

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Among one-parent family groups, that is, among one-parent family households and one-parent subfamilies living in households maintained by someone else, 36 percent in 1993 had a never-married parent (Figure 17). The other 64 percent consisted of those parents who were widowed, divorce, or separated. By race, there were notable differences. For whites, 26 percent of the one-parent family groups had a never-married parent, compared to 59 percent for Blacks, and 42 percent for persons of Hispanic origin (who may be of any race).

The family environment of children was completely transformed during the past 150 years by a series of revolutionary changes in family composition, parental work, and family income. This section of the chapter draws especially on a new socio-historical study, *America's Children: Resources from Family, Government, and the Economy* (Hernandez, 1993), to present statistics for children documenting the timing and magnitude of these transformations, and to discuss why they occurred. The section then shows how changes in family income, poverty, and welfare dependence since the Great Depression have been linked to changes in parent's work and family composition. An important innovation of these analyses is that unlike most past social, economic, and demographic research, children are the primary unit of statistical analysis (Hernandez, 1986; Qvortrup, 1993).

This section also presents statistics documenting the expanding need for non-parental childcare, and children's current situation with regard to health insurance coverage, housing conditions, and the prevalence of disabilities. It then offers examples suggesting why it is important that statistical analyses use children as the primary unit of analysis, and why such statistics are essential to the development of effective public policies. Finally, the section describes plans for a new national survey, the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD), that will provide new statistics measuring the developmental status and well-being of children, and measuring the effects that welfare reform and health care reform will have for the well-being and future prospects of children.

This section now begins by discussing three revolutionary changes experienced by children during the past 150 years: the revolutionary shift to non-farm work by fathers, the drastic constriction in family size, and the enormous expansion in schooling. It then turns to more recent transformations, the revolutionary increases in mother's labor force participation, and in mother-child families with no father present in the home. From the perspective of children and their parents, a fundamental cause driving these seemingly disparate changes was the desire of parents to improve, maintain, or regain their relative social and economic status compared with other families, when confronted with changing and often uncertain, difficult, or precarious social and economic conditions.

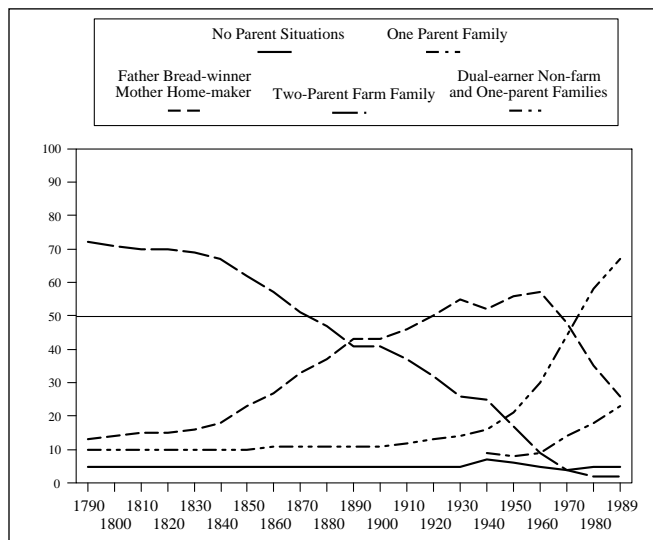
THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

THE REVOLUTIONARY RISE IN FATHER'S NON-FARM WORK

From the beginning of U.S. history, agriculture and the two-parent farm family were primary forms of economic production and family organization. Once it began, the shift away from farming to the nonfarm, father-as-breadwinner, mother-as-homemaker system of family organization was very rapid.

Figure 18 shows that a large majority of children, nearly 70 percent, lived in two-parent farm families in 1830, but by 1930 this had dropped to a minority of less than 30 percent. During the same 100 years, children living in nonfarm families with breadwinner fathers and homemaker mothers jumped from only 15 percent to a majority of 55 percent.

Figure 18. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AGE 0-17 IN FARM FAMILIES, FATHER AS BREADWINNER FAMILIES, AND DUAL-EARNER FAMILIES: 1790 - 1989



Note: estimates for 10 yr. intervals to 1980, and for 1989.

Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993, p. 103.

This represented a historically unprecedented transformation in the nature of childhood, away from two-parent families where family members worked side-by-side to sustain themselves in small farming communities, to two-parent families that lived in urban areas or cities with fathers who spent much of the day away from home to earn income required to support the family, while mothers remained in the home to care for their children and perform domestic functions.

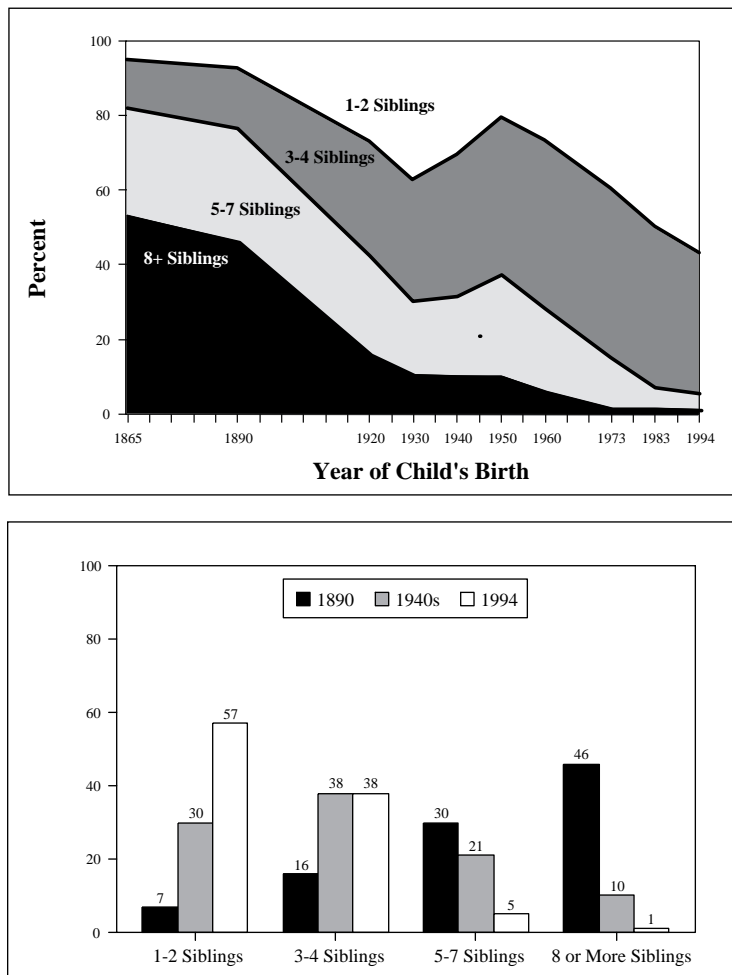
POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

THE REVOLUTIONARY DECLINE IN LARGE FAMILIES

This enormous shift out of farming to an urban life with fathers as the sole family breadwinner was accompanied by a revolutionary decline in large families. Figure 19 shows that 82 percent of adolescents born in 1865 lived in families with 5 children or more, but this fell to only 30 percent for those born in 1930. During these same 65 years, smaller families with only 1-4 children more than tripled from 18 percent to 70 percent. As a result the median number of siblings in the families of adolescents dropped by almost two-thirds, from 7.3 siblings to only 2.6 siblings per family.

This represented a complete transformation from a situation in which a majority of children were competing with at least 6 other siblings for their parents' time and economic resources, to a situation where nearly 60 percent of children either were only children, or they had only 1-2 other siblings in the home.

Figure 19. ACTUAL AND EXPECTED SIBSIZES FOR ADOLESCENTS BORN 1865 - 1994



Note: Based on birth expectations after 1965.

Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

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THE REVOLUTIONARY RISE IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS

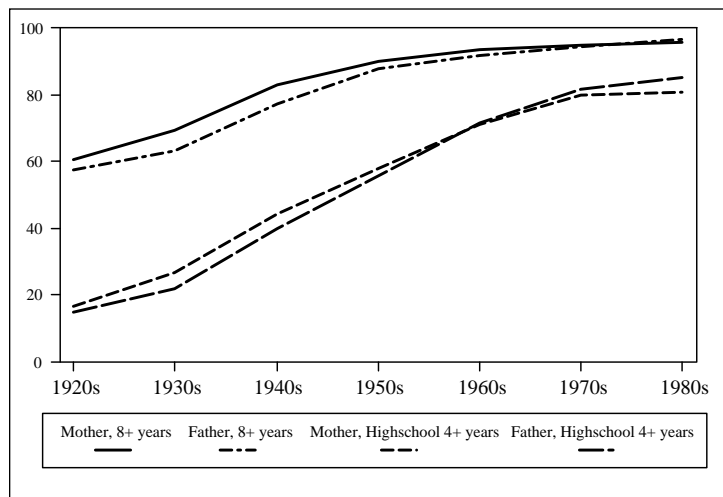
A third revolutionary change in children's lives occurred during the same era. School enrollment of children increased enormously, producing corresponding increases in educational attainments for children and for parents.

Between 1870 and 1940, school enrollment rates jumped sharply from about 50 percent for children age 5-19, to 95 percent for children age 7-13, and to 79 percent for children age 14-17. During the same time, among enrolled students, the number of days spent in school doubled, jumping from 21 percent of the total days in the year in 1870 to 42 percent of the days in the year in 1940. By 1940, then, school days accounted for 59 percent of all the non-weekend days in the year (Hernandez, 1993, pp. 146-148).

As more and more children 6 years and older spent larger and larger portions of the year in school, that is, in a formal educational setting, they also were spending less and less time at home with their parents. By 1940, 95 percent of children aged 7-13 were spending 5-6 hours per day in school, for 59 percent of all their non-weekend days. This represented a profound change in how children age 6 and above spent much of their waking time.

Since the children of today are the parents of tomorrow, this enormous increase in schooling also led, in due course, to corresponding increases in parents' education (Figure 20). Hence, among adolescents born in the 1940s, 77 percent had fathers with 8 or more years of schooling, and 39 percent had fathers who had completed at least 4 years of high school. Even larger, 83 percent had mothers with 8 or more years of schooling, and 44 percent had mothers completing at least 4 years of high school.

Figure 20. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN BORN BETWEEN 1920s AND 1980s WHOSE PARENTS HAVE SPECIFIED EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993,

WHY THE REVOLUTIONS IN FATHER'S WORK, FAMILY SIZE, AND SCHOOLING?

Why did these revolutions in father's work, family size, and schooling occur between the mid-to-late 1800s and 1930 or 1940? This question might be answered in many ways, but this section offers an explanation taking the viewpoint of children and their parents as the central organizing feature. The question then can be posed in the following way.

First, why did parents move from farms to urban areas where fathers could obtain jobs outside the farm sector of the economy? Second, why did parents drastically restrict their childbearing to a small number of children? Third, why did parents send their children to school to achieve increasingly high educational attainments? A single underlying force can be seen as motivating parents to pursue all three courses of action — the desire to improve, maintain, or regain the relative social and economic status of themselves and their children compared to other families, when confronted with changing and often uncertain, difficult, or precarious social and economic conditions.

The first question is “Why did parents move from farms to urban areas? The reason is that the shift from farming to urban occupations was typically required to achieve an improved relative economic status, or to keep from losing (too much) ground compared to others. The incomes provided by urban jobs were higher than the incomes that many people could earn through farming. Of course in some cases, the economic situation of families in rural areas was extremely precarious; and in such situations even poorly paid or dangerous jobs in urban areas might appear attractive compared to a rural situation with no employment and no source of economic support. In short, a fundamental cause of the massive migration from farms to urban areas was the comparatively favorable economic opportunities in urban areas.

This leads to the second question. Why did parents drastically restrict their childbearing to a small number of children? The shift from farming to urban areas meant that housing, food, clothing and other necessities had to be purchased with cash, making the costs of supporting each additional child increasingly apparent. At the same time, the potential economic contribution children could make to their parents and families was sharply reduced by the passage of laws restricting child labor and mandating compulsory education.

Also at the same time, as economic growth led to increases in the quality and quantity of available consumer products and services, expected consumption standards rose, and individuals were required to spend more money simply to maintain the new “normal” standard of living. Hence, the costs of supporting each additional child at a “normal” level increased as time passed.

In addition, newly available goods and services competed with children for parental time and money. Since each additional child in a family requires additional financial support and makes additional demands on parents' time and attention, the birth of each child reduces the time and money parents can devote to their own work or careers as well as to recreation and to older children.

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WHY THE REVOLUTIONS IN FATHER'S WORK, FAMILY SIZE, AND SCHOOLING? (continued)

As a result, more and more parents limited their family size to a comparatively small number of children, so that available income could be spread less thinly.

This leads to the third question. Why did parents send their children to school to achieve increasingly high educational attainments? At one level, as farming was overshadowed by the industrial economy and family size was shrinking, school enrollment increased because of the efforts of labor unions to ensure jobs for adults (mainly fathers) by limiting child labor, and because of the efforts of the child welfare movement to obtain the passage of laws protecting children from unsafe and unfair working conditions. These movements also achieved corresponding success in gaining the passage of compulsory education laws, through which the government both mandated and paid for essentially universal schooling.

But in addition, as time passed, higher educational attainments became increasingly necessary to obtain jobs that offered higher incomes and greater prestige. Hence, parents encouraged and fostered higher educational attainments among their children as a path for children to achieve occupational and economic success in adulthood, that is, so that their children might improve their relative social and economic standing, compared to others in the children's own generation.

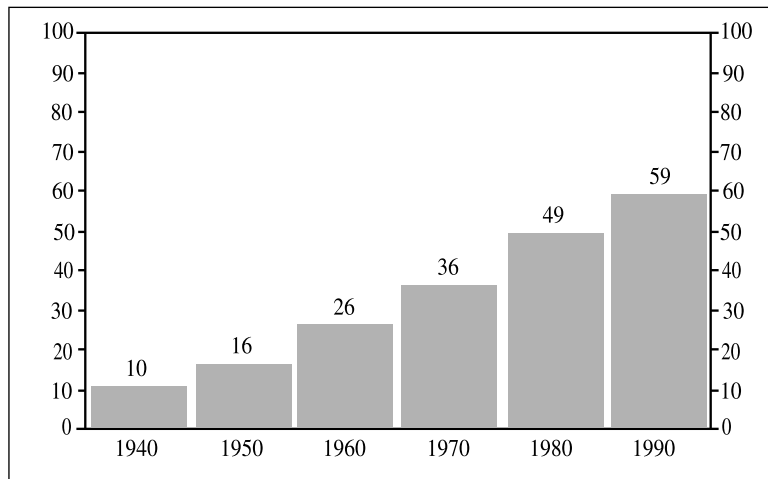
POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

THE REVOLUTIONARY RISE IN MOTHER'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

After 1940, two additional revolutions in children's families began. First was the explosion in mother's employment outside the home. Figure 21 shows that only 10 percent of children in 1940 lived with a mother who was in the labor force (employed plus unemployed in Table 18). This increased by 6 percentage points during the 1940s, and then by at least 10 percentage points during each of the next four decades. By 1990, nearly 60 percent of children had a working mother, a six-fold increase in fifty years.

Just as children in an earlier era experienced a massive movement by fathers out of the family home to work at jobs in the urban-industrial economy, children since the Great Depression have experienced a massive movement by mothers into the paid labor force.

Figure 21. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN WITH MOTHERS IN THE LABOR FORCE: 1940 - 1990



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993,

Both of these revolutions in parents' work brought enormous changes in the day-to-day lives of children. As fathers entered the urban labor force, children age 6 and over entered schools and spent increasing proportions of their lives in formal educational settings. Now, as mothers are entering the labor force, children under age 6 are spending increasing amounts of time in the care of someone other than their parents.

The revolution in mother's work is occurring twice as fast as the revolution in father's work, however. The decline for children in the two-parent farm family from 60 percent to 10 percent required the 100 years from 1860 to 1960 (Figure 18). But the corresponding rise in working mothers from 10 percent to 60 percent required only the 50 years from 1940 to 1990 (Figure 21).

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

WHY THE REVOLUTION IN MOTHER'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION?

What caused the profound increase in mother's labor force participation after 1940? Much of the answer lies in the historic changes that occurred in the family and economy. As suggested earlier, between the early days of the Industrial Revolution and about 1940, many parents had three major avenues for maintaining, improving, or regaining their relative economic standing compared with other families.

First, they could move off the farm and have the husband work in comparatively well-paid jobs in the growing urban-industrial economy. Second, they could limit themselves to a smaller number of children so that available family income could be spread less thinly, compared to families with larger numbers of children. Third, they could increase their educational attainments.

By 1940, however, only 23 percent of Americans lived on farms, and 70 percent of parents had only 1-2 dependent children in the home. Consequently, for many parents, these two historical avenues for maintaining, improving, or regaining their relative economic standing had run their course. In addition, since most persons achieve their ultimate educational attainments by age 25, additional schooling beyond age 25 is often difficult or impractical.

With these avenues to improving their family's relative economic status effectively closed for a large majority of parents after age 25, a fourth major avenue to improving family income emerged between 1940 and 1960, namely, paid work by wives and mothers, because the traditional sources of female nonfarm labor, that is, unmarried women, were either stationary or in the process of declining in size, while the demand for female workers was increasing (Oppenheimer, 1970).

Meanwhile, mothers also were becoming increasingly available and increasingly well-qualified for work outside the home. By 1940, the historically unprecedented increase in children's school enrollment had effectively released mothers from personal child-care responsibilities for a time period equivalent to about two-thirds of the hours in an adult work-day for about two-thirds of a full-time adult work-year, except for the few years before children entered elementary school. In addition, many women were highly educated, since the educational attainments of women and mothers had increased along with those of men. By 1940 young women were more likely than young men to graduate from high school, and they were about two-thirds as likely to graduate from college.

Paid work outside the home for mothers was becoming increasingly attractive in our competitive, consumption-oriented society for another reason. For example, families in which husband's income was comparatively low could, by virtue of the wives' work, jump economically ahead of families in which the husbands had the same occupational status but lacked a working wife. Similarly, families of young men with low relative incomes could, by virtue of wives' work, jump economically ahead of both other young families and older families that had no working wife. But this in turn placed families with comparatively well-paid husbands at a disadvantage, which made their wives' work more attractive (Oppenheimer, 1982).

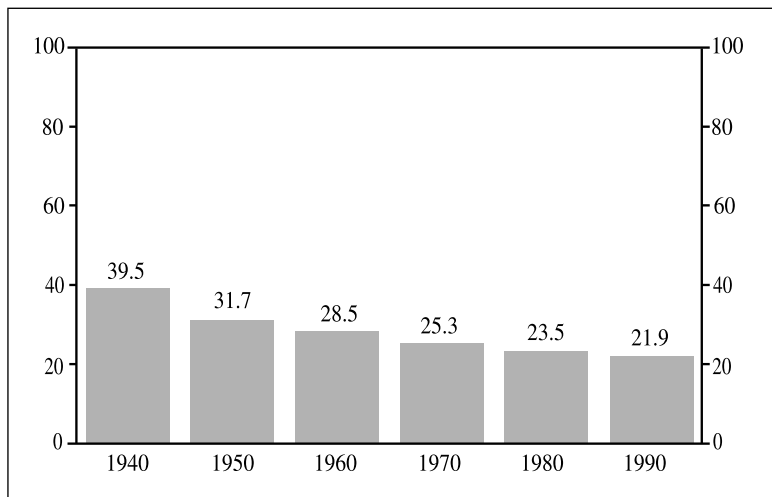
POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

In addition, with the historic rise in divorce, which is discussed below, paid work became increasingly attractive to mothers as a hedge against the possible economic disaster of losing most or all of their husbands' income through divorce.

Immediate economic insecurity and need, associated with father's lack of access to full-time employment, also made mothers' work attractive. Figure 22 shows that 40 percent of children in the Great Depression year of 1940 lived with fathers who did not work year-round full-time (Table 18). While this proportion declined after the Great Depression, it has continued at high levels. In 1950 and 1960, 29-32 percent of children lived with fathers who did not work year-round full-time.

Even with the subsequent expansion in mother-only families with no father present in the home, which is discussed below, the proportion of all children living with fathers who did not work year-round full-time was 22-25 percent during the past two decades. Throughout the era since the Great Depression, then, at least one-fifth of children have lived with fathers who, during any given year, experienced part-time work or joblessness. This has been a powerful incentive for many mothers to work for pay.

Figure 22. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH A FATHER WHO WORKS LESS THAN FULL-TIME YEAR-ROUND: 1940 - 1990



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

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WHY THE REVOLUTION IN MOTHER'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION? (continued)

The importance of sheer economic necessity in fostering the growth in mother's employment is reflected in the following fact. As of 1988, 1 out of every 8 American children in two-parent families either would have been living in official poverty if their mothers had not worked, or they remained in official poverty despite their mother's paid employment.

Of course, the desire to maintain, improve, or regain their family's relative social and economic status is not the only reason that wives and mothers enter the labor force. Additional reasons to work include the personal non-financial rewards of the job itself, the opportunity to be productively involved with other adults, and the satisfactions associated with having a career in a high-prestige occupation. Nonetheless, for many mothers economic insecurity and need provide a powerful incentive to work for pay.

Finally, all these inducements for mothers to enter the labor force after 1940 existed in the presence of the fact that at age 25 young women still have a potential of about 40 years when they might work for pay in the labor force.

In short, a revolutionary increase in mothers' labor force participation occurred during the past half-century for the following reasons. By 1940 many mothers were potentially available for work, and mothers' work had become the only major avenue available to most couples over age 25 who sought to maintain, improve, or regain their relative social and economic status compared to other families. After 1940, not only was there an increasing economic demand for married women to enter the labor force, there also were increases among married women in the attractions of work and the economic need to work.

THE REVOLUTIONARY RISE IN MOTHER-ONLY FAMILIES

Twenty years after the beginning of this profound increase in mother's work, yet another unparalleled change in family life began, namely, an unprecedented increase in mother-only families where the father was not present in the home.

Figure 9 shows there was a remarkably steady eight-fold increase in divorce rates between the 1860s and 1960s (Table 8). Three noteworthy, but short-lived interruptions occurred in conjunction with the world wars and the Great Depression. Why did this historic long-term increase occur? On preindustrial farms, fathers and mothers had to work together to sustain the family, but with a nonfarm job, the father could, if he desired, depend on his own work alone for his income. He could leave his family, but take his income with him. At the same time, in moving to urban areas, husbands and wives left behind the rural small-town social controls that once censured divorce.

More recently, with the revolutionary post-1940 increase in mothers' labor force participation, the economic interdependence of husbands and wives was weakened further. A mother with a job could, if she desired, depend on her work alone for her income. She could separate or divorce the father, and take her income with her.

In addition, economic insecurity and need associated with erratic or limited employment prospects for many men also contributed to increasing divorce rates, as well as to out-of-wedlock childbearing. Regarding divorce, Glen Elder and his colleagues (Liker and Elder, 1983; Elder, Foster, and Conger, 1990; Conger, et al, 1990) have shown that instability in husbands' work, drops in family income, and a low ratio of family income-to-needs lead to increased hostility between husbands and wives, decreased marital quality, and increased risk of divorce. In fact, each of the three economic recessions between 1970 and 1982 led to a substantially larger increase in mother-only families for children than did the preceding non-recessionary period.

A rough estimate of the size of this recession effect for children has been developed by assuming that, without each recession, the average annual increase in mother-only families would have been the same during recession years as during the immediately preceding non-recessionary period. The results suggest that recessions account for about 30 percent of the overall increase in mother-only families between 1968 and 1988, or for about 50 percent of the increase in mother-only families with separated or divorced mothers (Hernandez, 1993, pp 389-391).

Since 70 percent of the increase in mother-only families for white children between 1960 and 1988 can be accounted for by the rise in separation and divorce, these explanations may account for much of the rise in mother-only families for white children during these decades (Table 19).

Between 1940 and 1960, black children experienced much larger increases than white children in the proportion living in a mother-only family with a divorced or separated mother. But, especially since 1970, black children also have experienced extremely large increases in the proportion in mother-only families with a never-married mother.

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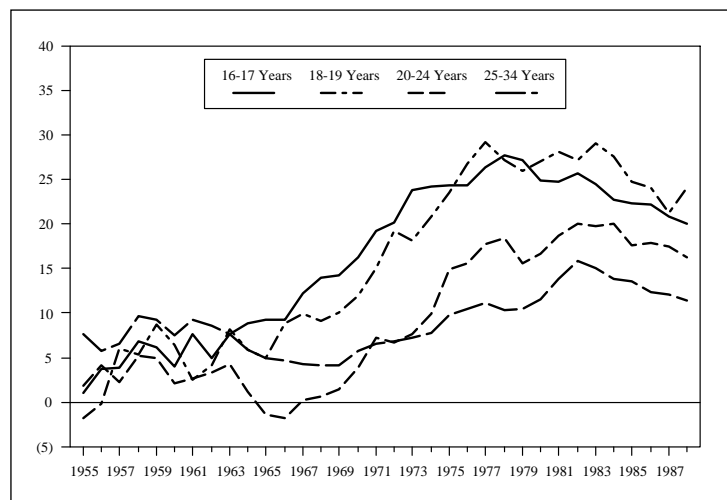
THE REVOLUTIONARY RISE IN MOTHER-ONLY FAMILIES (continued)

Without going into great detail here, Hernandez (1993, pp.397-399) argues that the factors leading to increased separation and divorce among whites were also important for blacks, but that the startling drop in the proportion of blacks living on farms between 1940 and 1960, from 44 percent in 1940 to only 11 percent in 1960, and the extraordinary economic pressures and hardships faced by black families may account for much of the much higher proportion of black children than white children who lived in mother-only families.

In addition, drawing upon the work of William Julius Wilson (1987), as shown in Figure 23, Hernandez calculated that the extent to which joblessness of young black men aged 16-24 exceeded joblessness among young white men expanded from almost negligible in 1955 to 15-25 percentage points by 1975-1989. Faced with this large and rapid reduction in the availability of black men during the main family-building ages who might provide significant support to a family, many young black women appear to have decided to forgo a temporary and unrewarding marriage — in fact, a marriage in which a jobless or poorly-paid husband might act as a financial drain.

The size of this increased racial gap in joblessness is at least two-thirds the size of the 23 percentage point increase that occurred between 1960 and 1988 in the racial gap in the proportion of children living in mother-only families with never-married mothers. Consequently, the increasing racial gap in joblessness may well be the major cause of the increasing racial gap in the proportion of children living in mother-only families with never-married mothers.

Figure 23. PERCENTAGE POINTS BY WHICH WHITE MALE EMPLOYMENT EXCEEDS BLACK MALE EMPLOYMENT: 1955 - 1988

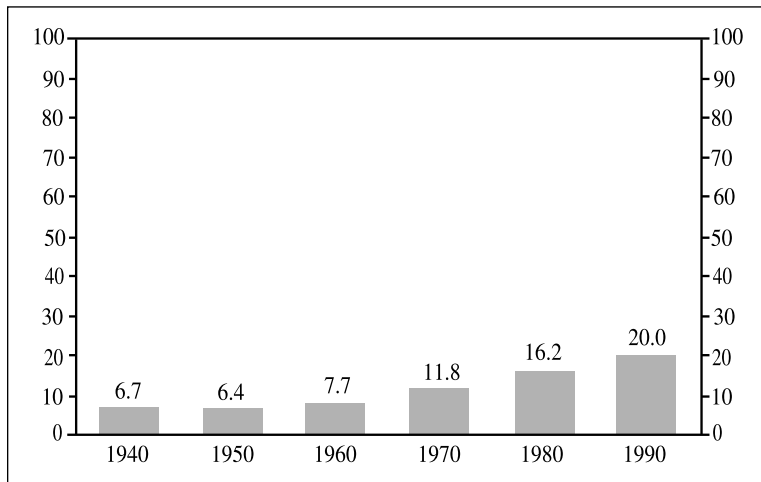


Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

As a result of sharp increases in divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing, Figure 24 shows that the proportion of children living with their mother, but no father in the home, about tripled from 6-8 percent between 1940 and 1960 to 20 percent in 1990. By 1990, children in mother-only families were about twice as likely to live with a divorced or separated mother as with a never-married mother. Hence separation and divorce account for about two-thirds of children living in mother-only families, and out-of-wedlock childbearing accounts for about one-third of children living in mother-only families.

Figure 24. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH MOTHER ONLY: 1940 - 1990



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993,

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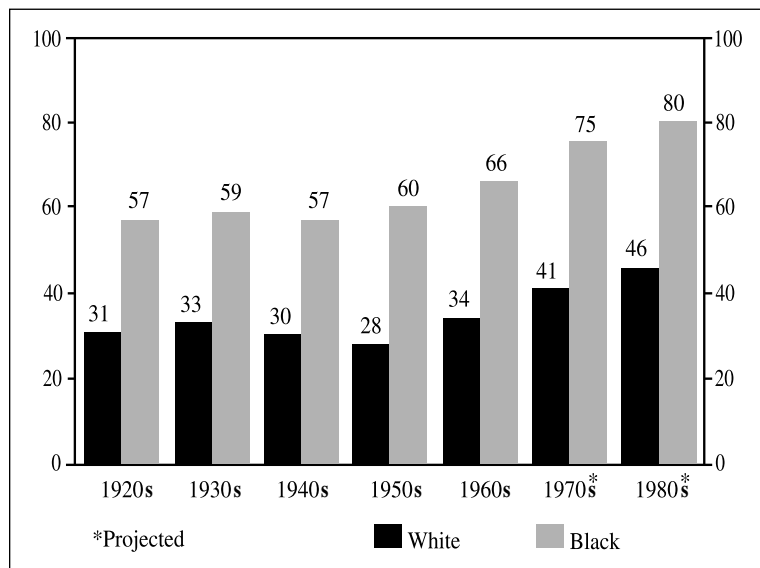
HISTORIC EXPERIENCE WITH ONE-PARENT FAMILIES

It was not until after 1960, however, that historic increases in divorce led to increases in children living with one parent. The reason is that historic increases in divorce were simply counter-balancing historic declines in parents' death rates. Both historically and today, however, large proportions of children spend at least part of their childhood with fewer than two parents in the home, because of their parent's death, divorce, or out-of-wedlock childbearing.

Figure 25 shows for white children born between 1920 and 1960, for example, that a large minority of 28-34 percent spent part of their childhood living with fewer than two parents. In addition, this proportion was about constant for white children born between the late 1800s and 1920, since the historic decline in parental mortality was counter-balanced by the historic increase in divorce during the 100 years spanning the mid 1860s to the mid 1960s. Projections indicate, however, that the proportion ever spending time in a family with fewer than two parents will increase to about 50 percent for white children born since 1980.

Among black children born between 1920 and 1950, an enormous 55-60 percent spent part of their childhood living with fewer than two parents, and, again, additional evidence indicates that this proportion was roughly the same for black children born since the late 1800s. Projections indicate that this will rise to about 80 percent for black children born since 1980.

Figure 25. WHITE AND BLACK CHILDREN EVER LIVING WITH FEWER THAN TWO PARENTS BY AGE 17: 1920S - 1980S COHORTS



Note: 1970 and 1980 are projected.

Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

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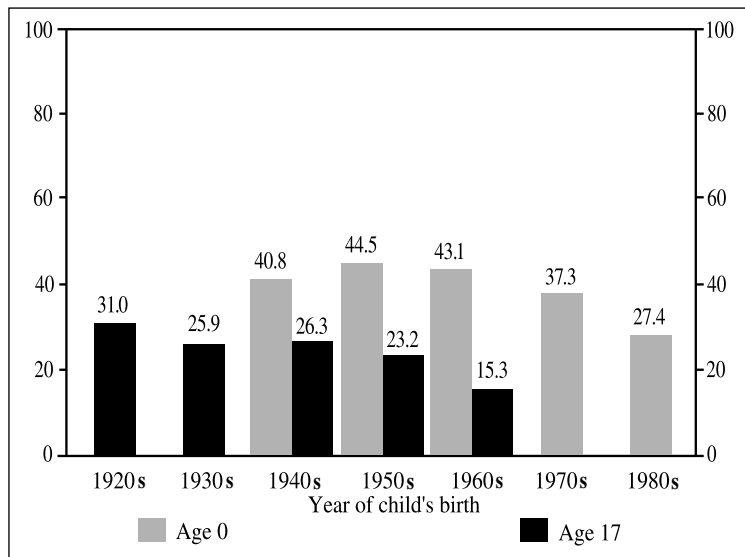
THE MYTH OF THE “OZZIE AND HARRIET FAMILY”

What do these results about insecurity in father's employment, increases in mother's employment, and parental presence in the home imply for the family situation of children? One extremely important implication is that never since at least the Great Depression have a majority of children lived in the idealized family situation where the father worked full-time year-round, the mother was a full-time homemaker, and all the children were born after the parents' only marriage (Table 18).

In the 1950s, the “Ozzie and Harriet” television program portrayed the idealized urban American family in which the father was a full-time year-round worker, the mother was a full-time homemaker without a paid job, and all the children were born after the parents' only marriage.

As Figure 26 shows, even among newborn children under age 1, a majority since 1940 have not begun life in an “Ozzie and Harriet” family. Since at least the Great Depression, even for newborn children, the mid-twentieth century ideal of family living has been a myth. For any single year, the reality has been that more than one-half of children were born into families that did not conform to this ideal, because the father worked less than full-time year-around, because the mother was engaged in paid employment, or because not all of the children were born after the parents' only marriage.

Figure 26. CHILDREN IN OZZIE AND HARRIET FAMILIES AT AGES 0 AND 17 FOR 1920s - 1980s COHORTS



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., “America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy,” Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

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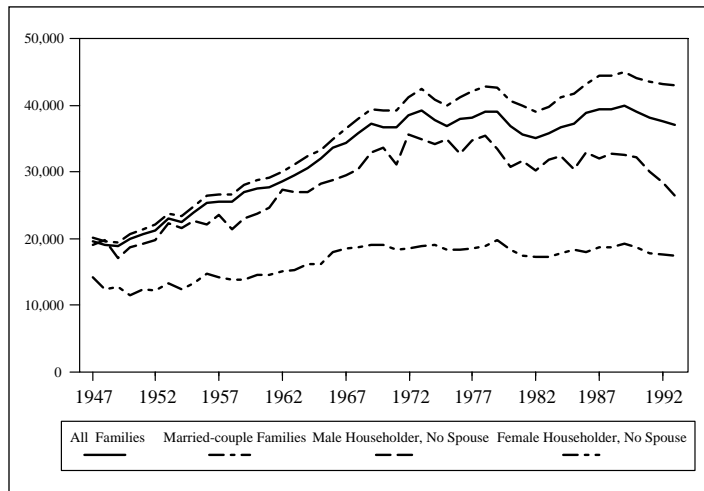
FAMILY INCOME AND POVERTY

As the historic revolutions in father's work, family size, and men's educational attainments drew to a close in the early 1970s, and as the post-1940 revolutions in mothers' work and mother-only families proceeded, what changes occurred in income and poverty? Briefly, the answer is as follows.

Figure 27 shows that median family income more than doubled during the 26 years from 1947 to 1973. But twenty years later in 1993, median family income was at exactly the same level as in 1973, despite the enormous jump in mothers' labor force participation.

Turning to poverty, because of the enormous increase in real income and the real standard of living between 1940 and 1973, social perceptions about income levels that were "normal" and "adequate" changed substantially. The relative nature of judgments about what income level is adequate or inadequate has been noted for at least 200 years. In the *Wealth of Nations*, for example, Adam Smith (1776) emphasized that poverty must be defined in comparison to contemporary standards of living. He defined economic hardship as the experience of being unable to consume commodities that "the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without."

Figure 27. MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME, BY TYPE OF FAMILY: 1947 - 1993 (In 1993 dollars) (thousands of dollars)



Source: ISBPL-2, "Income Summary Measures for Families in the United States: 1947 to 1993," Table F-7, Income Statistics Branch, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, May 8, 1995.

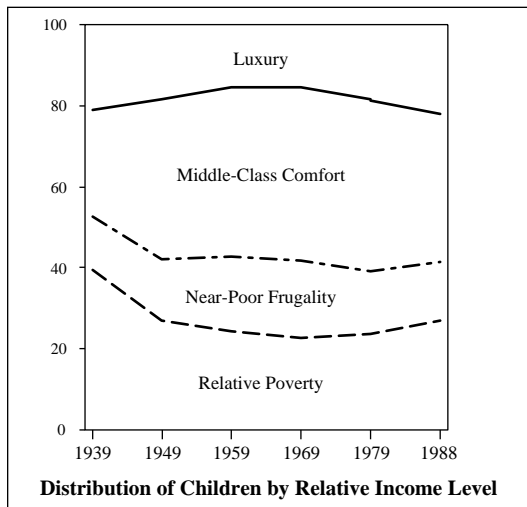
More recently, John Kenneth Galbraith (1958, pp 323-324) also argued that "(p)eople are poverty-stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community. Then they cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency; and they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgment of the larger community that they are indecent. They are degraded for, in a literal sense, they live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as respectable."

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Based on these insights, and Lee Rainwater's (1974) comprehensive review of existing U.S. studies and his own original research, as well as additional literature, Hernandez (1993) developed a measure of relative poverty relying on poverty thresholds set at 50 percent of median family income in specific years, and adjusted for family size.

Figure 28 shows that the relative poverty rate among children dropped sharply after the Great Depression from 38 to 27 percent between 1939 and 1949. The 1950s and 1960s brought an additional decline of 4 percentage points, but by 1988 the relative poverty rate for children had returned to the comparatively high level of 27 percent that children had experienced almost 40 years earlier in 1939.

Figure 28. CHILDREN BY RELATIVE INCOME LEVELS: 1939 - 1988 (Distribution of Children by Relative Income Level)



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

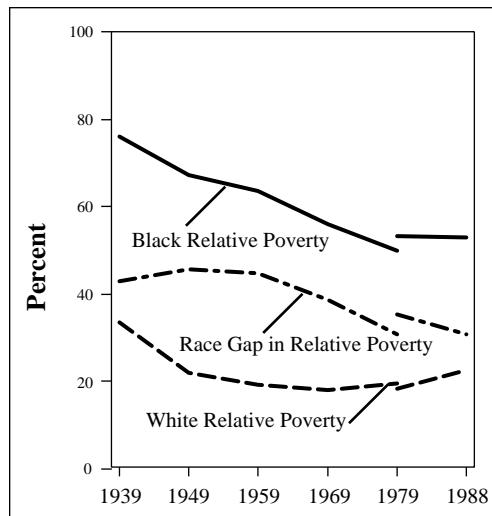
The pattern of change was somewhat different for whites and blacks, and the racial gap has been and continues to be enormous. In 1939, 76 percent of black children lived in relative poverty, compared with 33 percent of white children, for a large racial gap of 43 percentage points (Figure 29). Since 89 percent of blacks lived in slavery in 1860 (Farley and Allen, 1987, p. 13), it appears that compared with subsequent decades, relatively little improvement had occurred in the relative economic status of blacks between the Civil War and the Great Depression. After the Great Depression, black children shared in the general economic boom but by 1959 the racial gap in relative poverty rates for children was the same as it had been in 1939 (at 44 percentage points), and the proportion of black children living in relative poverty remained extremely large at 63 percent compared with 19 percent for white children.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

FAMILY INCOME AND POVERTY (continued)

Between 1959 and 1979, the relative poverty rate for black children continued to fall. Combined with the slight decline and subsequent turnaround in relative poverty experienced by white children, the racial gap finally narrowed during these decades. But the racial gap in relative poverty rates for children remained quite large (30-35 percentage points in 1979), and about 50-53 percent of black children still lived in relative poverty (more than two and one-half times the rate for white children).

Figure 29. PERCENTAGE OF WHITE AND BLACK CHILDREN IN RELATIVE POVERTY, AND RACE GAP: 1939 - 1988



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

Despite the improvements experienced by both black and white children after the Great depression, the 1970s marked the beginning of a new era in childhood poverty. For white children the relative poverty rate increased during the 1970s and 1980s, and by 1988 it had returned to a level not experienced since the 1940s. For black children, the decline in the relative poverty rate continued during the 1970s. But during the 1980s, the relative poverty rate for black children as a whole appears to have remained stable, and by 1988 it remained at an extraordinary level compared with whites, 52 percent—approximately 19 percentage points larger than the relative poverty rate for white children during the Great Depression year of 1939.

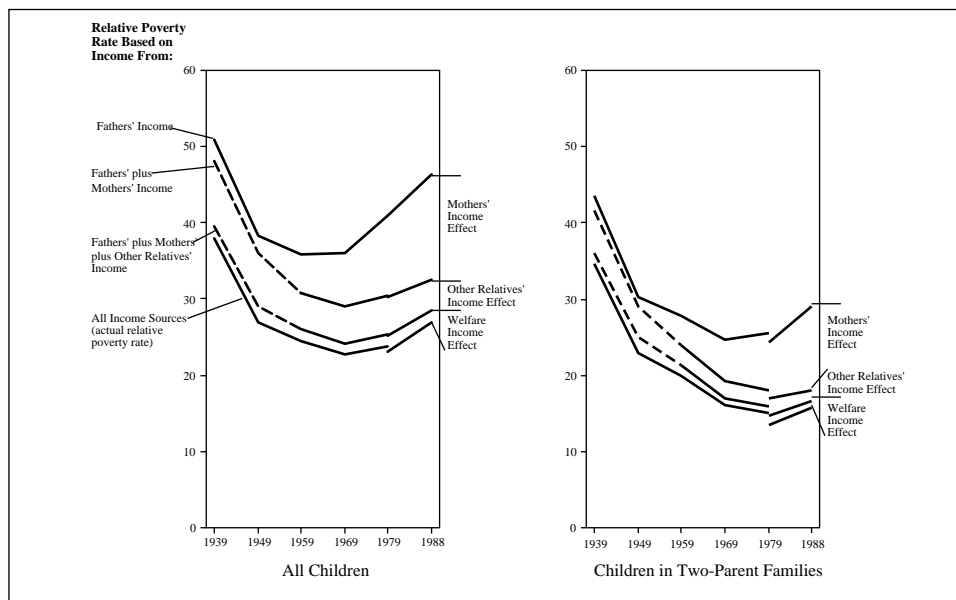
POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

ACCOUNTING FOR POVERTY CHANGE

To what extent can these changes in childhood relative poverty be accounted for by changes in income provided by fathers, mothers, and family members other than parents in the homes of children, and to what extent can they be accounted for by changes in income received from government welfare programs? Figure 30 provides an answer to these questions, both for children as a whole, and for children in two-parent families.

Figure 30 shows several hypothetical relative poverty rates. The top line shows what the relative poverty rate would have been for children, if only the income of fathers in the home had been available. The second line from the top shows what the relative poverty rate would have been for children, if only the income of fathers and mothers in the home had been available. The third line from the top shows what the relative poverty rate would have been for children, if only the income of fathers, mothers, and other relatives in the home had been available. Finally, the fourth shows the actual relative poverty rate including the income of all relatives in the home, and income received from the welfare programs of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Social Security.

Figure 30. RELATIVE POVERTY RATES AND EFFECTS OF PARENT'S INCOME AND GOVERNMENT WELFARE: 1939 - 1988



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

The top line in each half of Figure 30 shows the following. If children had available only the income from fathers living in the home, then the relative poverty rate would have fallen sharply during the 1940s, much more slowly or not at all during the 1950s and 1960s, and it would have increased substantially during the 1970s and 1980s.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

ACCOUNTING FOR POVERTY CHANGE (continued)

The difference between the two top lines shows the additional effect of income from mothers living in the homes of children. The results show that increasing mother's labor force participation acted to speed the decline in relative poverty that occurred during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and that it tended to slow the subsequent increase in relative poverty that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s.

In fact by 1988, 14 percent of all children depended on their mother's income to lift them out of relative poverty, and 11 percent of children in two-parent families depended on mother's income to life them out of relative poverty.

The difference between the second and third lines from the top shows the additional effect of income from other relatives in the home. The results show that, except during the Great Depression year of 1939, income from relatives other than parents in the home acted to reduce the relative poverty rate by a nearly constant and comparatively small 4-5 percentage points for children as a whole, and by a nearly constant and even smaller 1-2 percentage points for children in two-parent families.

Finally, both for children as a whole and for children in two-parent families, the results indicate that the welfare programs of AFDC and Social Security acted to reduce the relative poverty rate for children by a stable and small 1-2 percentage points in any given year. Hence, the role of these welfare programs in reducing relative poverty among children has been quite limited throughout the era since the Great Depression.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

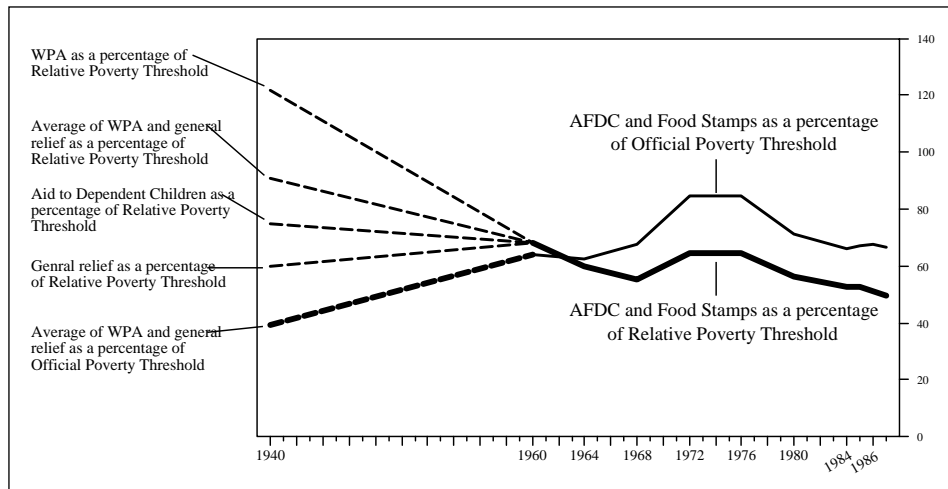
THE RELATIVE VALUE OF WELFARE BENEFITS

A key reason that the welfare programs of AFDC and Social Security have had a only a small and nearly stable effect on relative poverty rates of children since the Great Depression is that the benefit levels of welfare programs have been well below 50 percent of median family income throughout the era, that is, well below the relative poverty threshold throughout the era.

Combining the cash value of AFDC and Food Stamps, for example, as of 1960 the value of benefits from these two welfare programs was equal to only 64 percent of the official poverty threshold and 68 percent of the relative poverty threshold (Figure 31). Between 1960 and 1972, the value of these benefits as a proportion of the official poverty threshold increased sharply, but as a proportion of the relative poverty threshold their value declined sharply between 1960 and 1968, and the subsequent sharp increase did not offset the earlier decline. The reason for the remarkable differences between these trends is that the American family experienced a large 40 percent increase in median income between 1960 and 1972. Hence, during these 12 years, the combined value of AFDC and Food Stamps increased by 20.7 percentage points as a proportion of the official poverty threshold, but it declined by 3.7 percentage points as a proportion of the relative poverty threshold.

During the subsequent 15 years from 1972 to 1987, sharp declines occurred in both the absolute and relative value of AFDC and Food Stamps. By 1987, the absolute value of these benefits had fallen to nearly the level of 1960, while their value as a proportion of the relative poverty threshold had fallen (by a large 18.4 percentage points) to only 50 percent of the relative poverty threshold.

Figure 31. VALUE OF AFDC AND FOOD STAMPS WELFARE PROGRAMS AS PERCENTAGE OF RELATIVE AND OFFICIAL POVERTY THRESHOLDS: 1940 - 1987



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

THE RELATIVE VALUE OF WELFARE BENEFITS

Even at their peak value in the 1970s, AFDC and Food Stamps together provided an income equal to only about 84 percent of the official poverty threshold and 64 percent of the relative poverty threshold, and by 1987 their combined value had fallen to only 67 and 50 percent of the official and relative thresholds, respectively. Hence, since at least 1959, a family that depended only on these welfare programs for support would, despite changes in benefit levels, have lived substantially below the relative and official poverty thresholds.

Figure 31 also presents crude estimates (for 1940) of the relative value of three different welfare programs that span virtually the entire range of benefit levels of various welfare programs of the time. The results indicate that the General Relief program, the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, and the Work Projects Administration (WPA) program provided incomes that were equal, respectively, to about 60, 75, and 122 percent of the relative poverty threshold for 1940.

The relative value of ADC benefits in 1940, then, was probably somewhat more than the relative value of benefits in its successor program, AFDC, 20 years later in 1960. WPA employment benefits had a value that was about 1.6 to 2.0 times as large as the ADC and General Relief benefits. These comparative benefit values are consistent with the ideas that WPA employment income “was intended to provide a minimum standard of living and to make other relief (welfare) unnecessary,” and that it “was not to exceed the earnings paid to corresponding occupational groups in private employment” (Burns and Kerr, 1942: 713, 720). Hence, the value of WPA benefits in 1940 was somewhat above the contemporary relative poverty threshold but well below, about 39 percent below, the median family income of the time.

Since the WPA and General Relief programs were probably the two most important welfare programs from the viewpoint of children in 1940, since approximately equal numbers of persons received benefits from these programs, and since the average benefit level of these two programs was nearly the same as the average benefit level of the two next-largest welfare programs of the time, the average benefit level for all welfare programs in 1940 was roughly equal to the average of WPA and General Relief (National Resources Planning Board, 1942: p. 161, Appendix 9).

In fact, considering the entire series of estimates, the absolute measure suggests that the peak of welfare benefits probably occurred during the mid-1970s, and that the value of welfare benefits had fallen substantially by 1987, but to the comparatively high level of about 1970. The relative measure, quite the contrary, indicates that the relative value of welfare benefits may have fallen to a historic low during the late 1960s. But this was followed by an additional decline, after a sharp but brief increase during the early 1970s, to another historically low level in 1987 that was slightly more than one-half the average level of welfare benefits documented for 1940.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Taken together, these results suggest that the absolute value of welfare benefits grew greatly after 1940 but that this increase did not keep pace with the general rise in the American standard of living—except during 1968-1972—and that by 1987 the relative benefit levels of AFDC and Food Stamps were lower than they had been at any time since the Great Depression.

These results show why welfare programs, historically, had little effect on the relative poverty rate for children; the value of the benefits were not by themselves high enough to lift a family out of relative poverty. These results suggest, in addition, that welfare programs act to lift children out of relative poverty only if they are combined with other sources of income as indicated in the following three examples.

First, if children are in a family earning enough income to lift themselves out of poverty, but family members lose their jobs and turn to welfare income during a specific year, then the combined income from jobs and welfare might be enough to lift the family out of poverty. Second, if children are in a family receiving welfare, but in which family members obtain work that has an income high enough to lift the family out of poverty, then, again, the combined income from work and welfare might be enough to lift the family out of poverty. Third, if family members are working but simply do not earn enough income to lift themselves out of relative poverty, then access to some welfare income might be enough to tip the scales and lift the family out of poverty. In short, these examples suggest that most children living in families which receive welfare benefits are also often living in families which have enough income to lift themselves out of poverty only if they somehow combine welfare with work by one or more family members.

These examples also suggest an important question about the extent to which relatively poor children live in working-poor families, namely, "To what extent do children in relatively poor families live in families which are self-supporting versus welfare-dependent?" Statistics bearing on this question are presented next.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

RELATIVE POVERTY, WORK, AND WELFARE DEPENDENCE

To what extent have relatively poor children historically lived in working-poor or welfare-dependent families? It is not easy to answer this question because income questions asked in the 1940-1980 censuses and in the Current Population Survey (CPS) since 1980 have differed sometimes greatly. Table 20 presents statistics based on new procedures that are maximally comparable to offer a crude answer to this question (Hernandez, 1993, 276-280). In this table, children are classified as being at least partly welfare-dependent if at least one family member in the home received cash income from public assistance programs of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Social Security programs.

Estimates for 1979 from the census and CPS differ noticeable, apparently because the CPS asks more detailed income questions that yield a larger, and presumably more accurate, estimate of the number of persons receiving welfare. This census-CPS difference for 1979 suggests that census-based estimates of welfare dependence in 1959 and 1969 may also be somewhat too low. Still, decade-by-decade changes in census-based estimates between 1959 and 1979 should be accurate within a few percentage points.

The results indicate that for relatively poor children in 1939, about 60-70 percent lived in fully self-supporting families, about 10-18 percent lived in fully welfare-dependent families, and about 12-30 percent lived in working-welfare-dependent families whose income was partly earned and partly derived from welfare programs.

Hence, in 1939 about 30-40 percent of relatively poor children lived in families that were at least partly welfare-dependent. However, 17 percent of all relatively poor children lived in families in which at least one member was employed by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) and other government-sponsored "emergency work programs" that provided benefits in return for work. Consequently, perhaps as few as 15-30 percent of relatively poor children lived in families that were at least partly dependent on non-work welfare.

What changes occurred following the Great Depression, when jobs became more plentiful, and the relative poverty rate for children dropped sharply? The census-based estimates for 1959 indicate that of relatively poor children, about 70 percent lived in fully self-supporting families, and about 7 percent lived in fully welfare-dependent families. Subsequently, between 1959 and 1979, the proportion of children who lived in fully self-supporting families declined from about 70 to 50 percent; the proportion living in working-welfare-dependent families increased from 24 to 33 percent; and the proportion in fully welfare-dependent families increased from about 7 to 18 percent. Comparatively little change occurred during the 1980s.

Overall, then, for the era from the Great Depression to 1988, relatively poor children have been much more likely to live in fully self-supporting families than in families fully dependent on AFDC or Social Security. The proportion of relatively poor children in fully self-supporting families declined somewhat from 60-70 percent between 1939 and 1969 to 50 percent during the 1980s, while the proportion living in fully welfare-dependent families increased from about 7 percent in 1959 to about 18 percent during the 1980s. Throughout the era since the Great Depression, then, a large minority of relatively poor children have benefited from welfare programs, yet at least one-half of relatively poor children lived in working-poor families that received no income from the AFDC or Social Security programs.

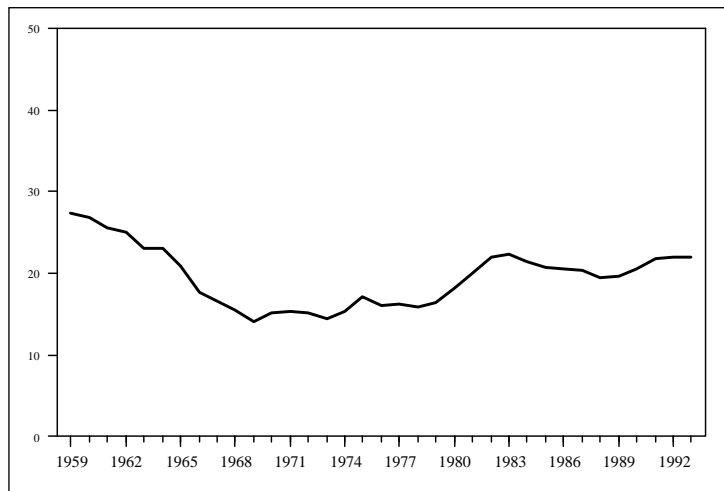
POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

OFFICIAL POVERTY, WORK, AND WELFARE DEPENDENCE

Despite the limitations of the official poverty measure for studying historical poverty change since the Great Depression, the estimates based on the official measure are of current interest, because this measure provides the official U.S. benchmark for poverty. (However, the National Academy of Sciences convened a “Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance: Concept, Information Needs, and Measurement Methods” which addressed, among other things, the question of how to most appropriately measure poverty in the U.S. See Citro and Michael, 1995.)

Beginning with the earliest estimates published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the official poverty rate for children dropped sharply from 27 percent in 1959 to only 14 percent in 1969 (Figure 32). But then official poverty among children increased during the 1970s and especially during the 1980s, and by 1991-1993, 23 percent lived below the official poverty thresholds.

Figure 32. OFFICIAL POVERTY RATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 18: 1959 - 1993



Source: POVPL1, “Poverty Statistics: 1959-1993,” Poverty and Health Statistics Branch, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994.

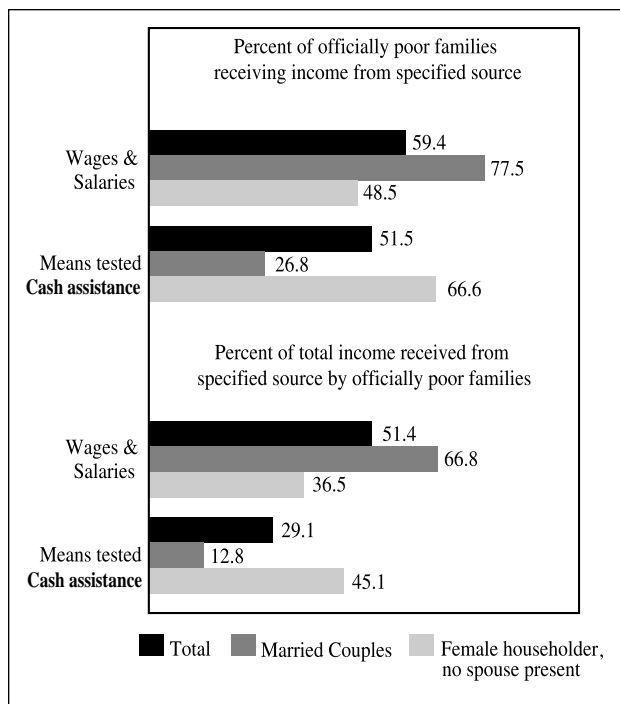
Among officially poor children, as among relatively poor children, a large proportion receive no income from the welfare programs of AFDC and Social Security (Table 20). By this measure, census based-estimates for 1959 indicate that of officially poor children, about 70 percent lived in fully-self-supporting families, and about 6 percent lived in fully welfare-dependent families. Subsequently, between 1959 and 1979, the proportion of children who lived in fully self-supporting families declined from about 70 to 42 percent; the proportion living in working-welfare dependent families increased from 25 to 34 percent; and the proportion in fully welfare-dependent families increased from about 6 to 25 percent. During the 1980s, comparatively little change occurred.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

OFFICIAL POVERTY, WORK, AND WELFARE DEPENDENCE (continued)

Figure 33 focuses more narrowly only on income from wages and salaries and on means-tested cash assistance welfare programs as of 1990, and it uses families with related children as the unit of analysis. These estimates exclude income from self-employment, interest and dividends, social security, and pension, survivor, and disability income. The results show that nearly 60 percent of officially poor families have wage and salary income, nearly 80 percent for two-parent families, and nearly 50 percent for households maintained by females with no spouse present. Hence, overall, a substantial majority of poor families with children are working-poor families.

Figure 33. INCOME FROM WAGES AND SALARIES AND FROM MEANS TESTED CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES WITH RELATED CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS LIVING IN POVERTY, BY FAMILY TYPE: 1990



Note: Means-tested income transfer programs are those which benefit only families with incomes and resources (assets) low enough to qualify.

Source: Littman, Mark S., "Poverty in the United States: 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Series P60-175, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1991.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Still, many poor families were eligible to receive cash benefits from means-tested welfare programs. Among officially poor families with children, the proportion of income received from means-tested cash assistance programs was 29 percent overall, at 13 percent for two-parent families and 45 percent for families maintained by female householders. Hence, overall, about one-half of the income of poor families with children is obtained from wages and salaries, and less than one-third is obtained from means-tested cash assistance programs.

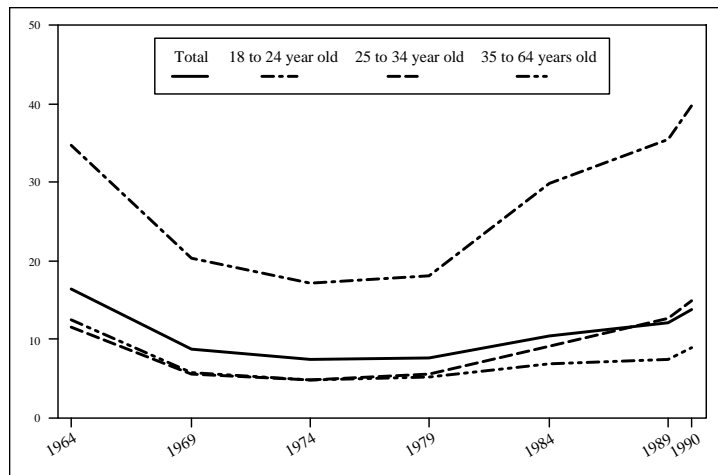
As was true with regard to the relative poverty rate for children after 1959, a comparison of changes in the actual official poverty rate and changes in the hypothetical official poverty rate based only on the income of fathers living in the home suggest that changes in fathers income have been very important in influencing poverty change for children, contributing most notably to the large official poverty increase for children after 1979, and that increases in mother's labor force participation tended to speed poverty declines, or to slow poverty increases that would have occurred if only father's incomes had been available, (Hernandez, 1993, p.374-375). Also, the additional effect of income from other relatives in the home was nearly constant at 4-5 percentage points, and the additional effect of the government welfare programs of AFDC and Social Security was comparatively small and varied between 2-3 percentage points.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

WORKING MEN WITH LOW EARNINGS

Analyses in preceding sections suggest that declines in father's incomes have contributed greatly since 1969 to increasing relative poverty and increasing official poverty among children. A recent Census Bureau report (McNeil, 1992) documented that substantial increases have occurred since the early 1970s in the extent to which men have "low earnings", that is, the extent to which the annual earnings of men are less than the official poverty level for a four-person family (Figure 34, Table 21).

Figure 34. YEAR-ROUND FULL-TIME MALE WORKERS WITH LOW ANNUAL EARNINGS: 1964, 1969, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, AND 1990



Source: McNeil, John, "Workers With Low Earnings: 1964 to 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P60-178, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1992.

Among all male workers, the proportion with low earnings declined from 33 percent in 1964 to 27 percent in 1969-1970. During the 1980s, the gains of the mid-1960s were lost, and by 1990, 33 percent of all male workers earned incomes too low to lift a family of four out of poverty. Among males working year-round, full-time, the changes were quite large. Between 1964 and 1974, the proportion of year-round full-time male workers with low incomes was cut in half, dropping from 17 percent to 8 percent, but most of this gain, too, was lost by 1990, when 14 percent of male, year-round full-time workers earned low incomes.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Especially striking has been the deterioration in the earnings of men who are year-round, full-time workers and who are in the main ages when children are in home. Among year-round full-time workers, the proportion with low earnings dropped for men age 18-24 from 35 to 17 percent between 1964 and 1974, but then jumped to 40 percent by 1990; the proportion with low earnings dropped for men age 25-34 from 12 to only 5 percent, but then jumped to 15 percent; and the proportion of men age 35-54 with low earnings dropped from 13 to 5 percent but then jumped to 9 percent.

The trends were similar for white and black males with year-round full-time work, but the proportion with low earnings was much higher for blacks than for whites. For white, male, year-round full-time workers, the proportion with low earnings dropped from 15 to 7 percent between 1964 and 1974, but then jumped to 13 percent by 1990. Among black, male, year-round full-time workers, the proportion with low earnings dropped from a very high 38 percent to 14 percent between 1964 and 1979, but then jumped to 22 percent by 1990. Among Hispanic origin, male, year-round full-time workers, the proportion with low earnings also jumped between 1974 and 1990, from 12 percent to 28 percent.

Finally, among husbands in married-couple families who were year-round full-time workers, the proportion with low earnings plummeted from 13 percent to 5 percent between 1964 and 1974, and then jumped to 9 percent by 1990.

In light of the steep declines during the late 1960s in the proportion of working men and husbands who did not earn enough income to lift a family of four out of poverty, and in light of the steep increases since 1974, but especially since 1979, in the proportion of working men and husbands who did not earn enough income to lift a family of four out of poverty, it is not surprising that trends in relative and official poverty rates for children followed a similar pattern during the past quarter-century, that is, that children have experienced large increases in relative and official poverty since 1969, but especially since 1979.

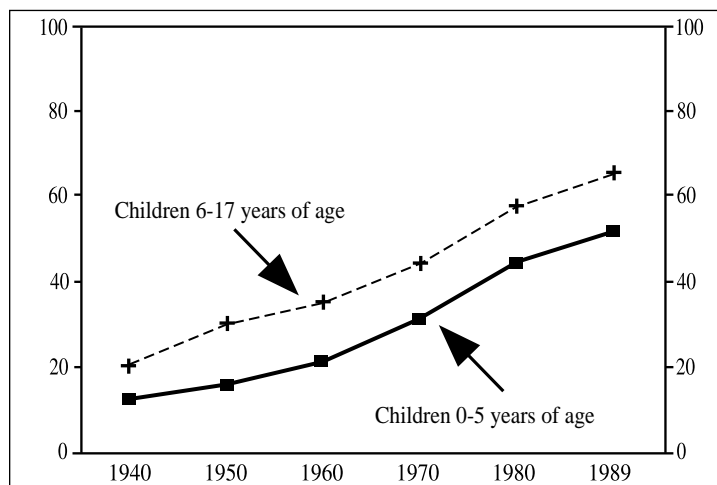
THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

THE PRESCHOOL CHILDCARE REVOLUTION

The earlier section on the revolutionary rise educational attainments portrayed the unprecedented increase that occurred during the past 120 years in non-parental care for children age 6-17. During that period, the total time children in this age group spent in school, and hence away from the family, nearly quadrupled, as more and more fathers took jobs away from home, as school attendance became compulsory, and as affluence increased and advanced formal education became increasingly necessary for many jobs.

During the past 50 years, the proportion of younger children age 0-5 who have no specific parent at home on a full-time basis also quadrupled as more and more mothers work away from home. The large reduction in the time that mothers with school-age children need to devote to the care and supervision of their children contributed to the great expansion in mother's labor force participation after 1940. Between 1940 and 1989, the proportion of school-age children who had no specific parent at home full-time more than tripled, from 20 to 66 percent (Table 22, Figure 35).

Figure 35. CHILDREN WITH NO SPECIFIC PARENT HOME FULL-TIME BY AGE: 1940 - 89



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

The historic rise in mother's paid work was not, however, limited only to mothers with school-age children, and among preschool-age children the proportion with no specific parent at home on a full-time basis climbed from 13 to 53 percent between 1940 and 1989. Consequently, the amount of parental time that is potentially available to preschoolers had declined substantially and the need for nonparental care has increased substantially.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Despite the increasing need for non-parental care, however, the proportion of preschoolers who have a relative in the home who might act as a surrogate parent declined between 1940 and 1980, from 19-20 percent to 4-5 percent among preschoolers living in dual-earner families, and from 52-57 percent to 22-25 percent for preschoolers living in one-parent families with an employed parent (Table 23). By 1989, about 48 percent of preschoolers had a specific nonemployed parent at home full-time (usually the mother), and 12 percent had employed parents who personally provided their preschoolers' care (often by working different hours or days). An additional 15 percent of preschoolers were cared for by relatives who often did not live in the preschoolers' home; and 25 percent were cared for by nonrelatives, about half in organized care facilities such as nursery schools (Hernandez, 1993, p. 170; O'Connell and Bachu, 1990, Table C).

What are the consequences for children of these changes in parental care and nonparental care? As described in an earlier section on poverty rates among children, mother's employment has had increasingly important, beneficial effects for the family income of children.

Regarding children's development, the National Academy of Sciences' recent literature review (Hayes, Palmer, and Zaslow, 1990, p. 77) suggests that mothers' employment and nonparental care are not inherently and pervasively harmful to preschoolers; nor is nonparental care a form of maternal deprivation, since children can and do form attachments to multiple caregivers if the number of caregivers is limited, the child-caregiver relationships are long-lasting, and the caregivers are responsive to the child's needs. Available evidence also suggests that the quality of care received by children is important and that some children, especially those from low-income families, are in double jeopardy from psychological and economic stress at home as well as from exposure to low-quality nonparental child care (For a review of literature on the quality of child care, see Phillips and Howe, 1987).

Additional potentially beneficial and detrimental effects of mothers' employment and nonparental care for preschoolers have also been identified, but most of these results must be viewed as both preliminary and tentative (Hernandez, 1993, pp. 170-175). Overall, research on the consequences of nonparental care for preschoolers is in its infancy, and much remains to be done.

Since the proportion of preschoolers who had a specific parent at home on a full-time basis declined from about 79 to 48 percent in the 29 years between 1960 and 1989, it appears that we may be roughly halfway through the preschool child-care revolution and that this second child-care revolution may be complete within 30-40 years, quite possibly before we have gained a detailed understanding of the effects, or lack of effects, that nonparental care has for preschoolers.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

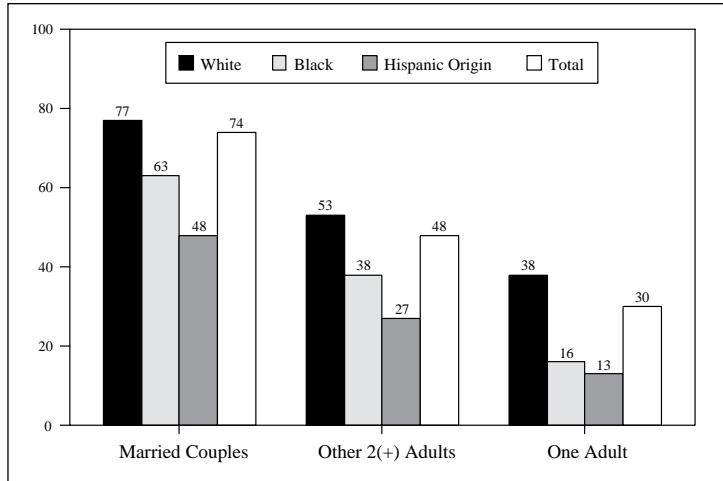
HOUSING FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

The housing situations of families with children differ substantially depending on the composition and income of the family. Decennial census data record that between 1890 and 1940, the percent of all housing units occupied by owners varied between 44-48 percent. After the Great Depression and World War II, the homeownership rate jumped to 55 percent in 1950, 62-63 percent in 1960 and 1970, and 64 percent in 1980. Data from the Housing Vacancy Survey, which provides a better estimate of change during the 1980s than does the decennial census because of a change in 1990 census question wording, indicates that the homeownership rate declined by about 1.8 percentage points during the 1980s, and that the decline actually occurred between 1980 and 1985. Since 1985 the homeownership rate has increased slightly.

Homeownership rates are quite different depending on the household composition, race and Hispanic origin of the residents. Seventy-four percent of married couples with children own their own home, compared to only 48 percent of families with children including two or more other adults, and only 30 percent of other families with children including only one adult (Figure 36). Homeownership rates for married-couple families with children are quite high, at 77 percent for whites, compared to only 63 percent for blacks, and 48 percent for Hispanics. Similarly, while 38 percent of white families with one adult with children are homeowners, the proportions for such black and Hispanic families are only 16 and 13 percent, respectively.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Figure 36. HOMEOWNERSHIP RATES, HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN BY TYPE, RACE, AND HISPANIC ORIGIN OF HOUSEHOLDER: 1991



Source: Woodward, Jeanne, "Housing America's Children in 1991," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Housing Reports, H121/93-6, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1993.

Homeowners tend to have much higher incomes than renters. For example, the median income among married couples is \$47,800 for owners, compared to \$27,100 for renters, and the median income for households with one adult is \$21,700 for owners and \$9,800 for renters (Figure 37). Similarly in married-couple families with children, among owners only 5 percent have low incomes, approximately at or below the official poverty levels, compared to 19 percent for renters, among households with children and one adult, 22 percent of owners have low incomes compared to 54 percent of renters (Figure 38).

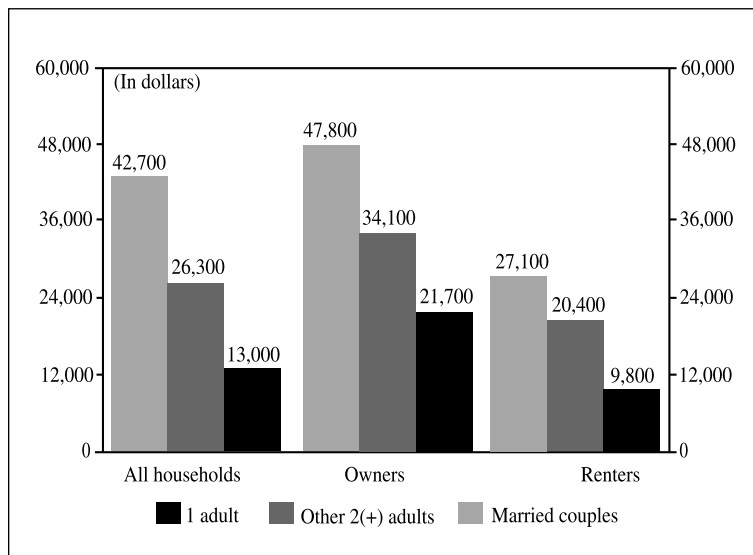
Regarding housing quality, among households with children, homeowners are only one-half as likely as renters to report living in units with physical problems, 7 versus 13 percent, respectively, and homeowners are only one-third as likely to lived in crowded conditions with 1.01 or more persons per room, 4 versus 12 percent, respectively (Table 24).

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

HOUSING FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN (continued)

Most households with children have complete kitchens and complete plumbing, but 89 percent of those maintained by married couples have washing machines, 85 percent have clothes dryers, and 61 percent have dishwashers, compared to households with children and one adult for whom the proportions are 61, 50, and 33 percent, respectively (Table 25). Hence, households with children and only one adult are more likely than households with children maintained by a married-couple to have to go out of the home for laundry and to wash dishes manually. Hence, notwithstanding the smaller number of adults in the home, households with children and only one adult may have to devote more time and effort, on average, to these basic household maintenance activities than do married-couple households with children.

Figure 37. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME, HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN BY TYPE AND TENURE: 1991 (in dollars)

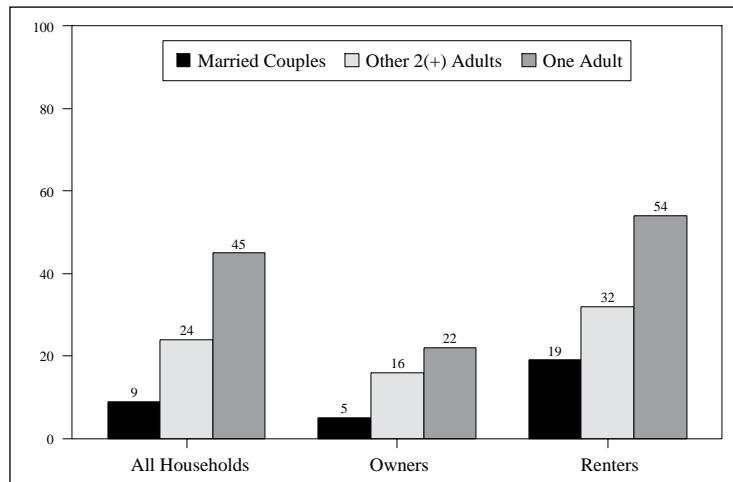


Source: Woodward, Jeanne, "Housing America's Children in 1991," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Housing Reports, H121/93-6, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1993.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Regarding the quality of the housing structure, the proportion of households reporting an opinion that the structure is in “good” condition ranges from 74 percent for married-couple households, to 60 percent for households with one adult. Similarly, regarding neighborhood quality, the proportion of households with children reporting an overall opinion of the neighborhood as “good” ranges from 72 percent for married-couple families to 54 percent for households with one adult (Table 26).

Figure 38. LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN BY TYPE AND TENURE: 1991



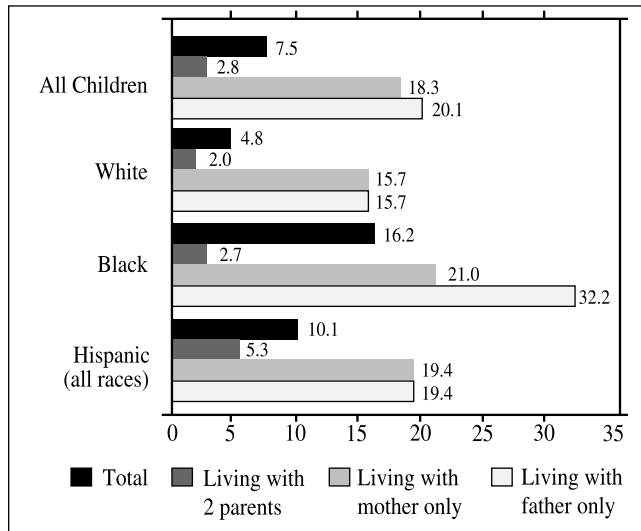
Source: Woodward, Jeanne, “Housing America’s Children in 1991,” U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Housing Reports, H121/93-6, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1993.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

CHILDREN LIVING WITH GRANDPARENTS AND IN DOUBLED-UP FAMILIES

Overall, about 8 percent of children have a grandparent in the home, but there are large differences by parental presence (Figure 39). Only 3 percent of children in two-parent families live with a grandparent, compared to 18 percent of children in mother-only families, and 20 percent living in father-only families. Despite this large difference, it is important to emphasize that at least 80 percent of children in one-parent families do not have a grandparent in the home.

Figure 39. GRANDPARENTS IN THE HOMES OF CHILDREN: 1990



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "We the American Children," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Series WE-10 U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1993.

Living with grandparents is one way in which children and their parent(s) may form a doubled-up household. For various reasons some children and their parents may live doubled-up with other relatives or with non-relatives. The reasons for doubling up seem likely to be closely connected with income, work, poverty, and/or the need for child care.

Some families with children may be doubled-up, because they do not have enough income to pay the down-payment, mortgage, or rent for a decent home of their own, or because they need someone in the home to provide child care. In other words, some children live in doubled-up families because their nuclear family needs some sort of financial or personal assistance. On the other hand, some families with children may be doubled-up because other persons in the home do not have enough income to pay for a decent home of their own, or because these other persons need their available income for some other purpose (such as health care), or because these other persons are themselves in need of personal care, such as elderly grandparents. In other words, some children live in doubled-up families because their nuclear family is providing financial or personal assistance to extended family members or friends.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

It also is possible, of course, that some families live doubled-up out of a sheer personal preference for the joy of living with their extended family or with family friends. It seems likely, though, given the apparently strong preference for nuclear family living arrangements in the U.S., that most doubled-up families with children are doubled-up either because they are in need or because they must provide housing or personal care to others. Insofar as most of these families are in need of assistance, many would probably be living in poverty if they were not doubled-up, or they may be living in poverty despite the fact that they are doubled-up, in some cases because providing housing to other family or non-family members has pulled them below the poverty threshold.

Before discussing statistics on doubling-up presented in Table 27, it is necessary to describe two measurement issues that affect the interpretation of these data (See Appendix I in this chapter for a more complete discussion of these and related measurement issues).

First, estimates for 1939-1979 were calculated from the Decennial Census of the Population, and for 1979-1988 from the Current Population Survey. These two sets of estimates for 1979 differ because of differences between the two data collection systems. In general, trends from one decade to the next are best measured using data from a single data collection system. Second, the Census Bureau implemented improved measurement procedures in the Current Population Survey (CPS) during the early 1980s to better identify parent-child relationships within homes. Preliminary estimates indicate that the result was an artifactual increase in the proportion of children living in mother-child families equal to about 1.67 percent of all children. Since all of these children lived in doubled-up families, the actual increase in doubled-up one-parent families during the 1980s is overestimated with CPS data by approximately this amount.

As a consequence, it seems likely that some of the apparent increase in doubling-up during the 1980s actually occurred during the 1970s. In discussing these results, this is taken into account. In general, for the 1980s and perhaps for the 1970s, the trend in doubling-up for children, that is, changes in the proportion doubled-up, may be indicated best by changes in the combined proportion who are either doubled-up or living with no parent in the home.

Between 1939 and 1969, the proportion of children living in doubled-up families fell from 22 percent to 11 percent (Table 27). Sometime after 1969, the trend reversed, and by 1988 about 13 percent of children lived in doubled-up families. An earlier section showed that the relative poverty rate for children also fell sharply as the Great Depression was replaced by the post World War II economic boom, and that the 1950s and 1960s brought additional, albeit smaller, declines in relative poverty (Figure 28). We also saw that this three-decade trend reversed during the 1970s and 1980s as the relative poverty rate for children increased. Consequently, these results indicate that trends in doubling-up and relative poverty for children have been broadly similar during the past half-century.

The same holds true for white children. Trends in relative poverty and in doubling-up have moved roughly in parallel for white children during the past fifty years. Throughout the era black children have been much more likely than white children to be living in relative poverty and to be living doubled-up or with no parent in the home. Trends in relative poverty rates for black children have not always paralleled trends in doubling-up, however, most notably since 1969, when doubling-up was increasing despite declining or stable relative poverty. These post-1969

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CHILDREN LIVING WITH GRANDPARENTS AND IN DOUBLED-UP FAMILIES (continued)

results for black children suggest that poverty per se may have become somewhat less important in doubling-up compared to other reasons for doubling-up, or that doubling-up may have become somewhat more necessary or effective as a family strategy for reducing poverty. Overall, by 1988, the proportion living in doubled-up families or with no parent in the home was about 1-in-7 for white children and nearly 1-in-3 for black children.

In addition to the sheer economic need to pay for housing, a second major reason for doubling-up may be the need for inexpensive assistance with child care. Since mother-child families may be especially likely to need housing assistance for economic reasons as well as easy access to inexpensive child care that may be provided by doubling-up, it seems likely that children in mother-child families would be especially likely to live doubled-up, and that the trends in doubling-up might be broadly similar to trends in the proportion of children living in mother-child families.

Results from a preceding section (Table 19) showed that the proportion of children in mother-child families remained about constant between the Great Depression and 1959, but then increased during each decade from 1959 to 1988. Table 27 shows the proportion of children living in doubled-up one-parent families remained about constant for an additional decade, that is, from 1939 to about 1969. Only during the past two decades has the proportion of children in doubled-up one-parent families increased.

Hence, the overall decline in the proportion of children living doubled-up between 1939 and 1969 can be fully accounted for by the decline in the proportion living in doubled-up two-parent families. The post World War II economic boom brought substantial declines in doubling-up, while the proportion of children living in mother-child families changed little during these decades. The historic increase in mother-child families began after 1959, but it was not until a decade later, that is, after 1969, that the historic trend in doubling-up was reversed. These results suggest that relative poverty declines tend to foster undoubling, while relative poverty increases tend to foster increased doubling-up.

Nevertheless, the post-1969 increases in doubling-up occurred through increases in children living in doubled-up one-parent families, since the proportion of children living in doubled-up two-parent families remained stable or declined during the 1970s and 1980s. Hence, at least during the past two decades it appears that doubling-up may have been especially necessary for families that both lived in poverty and needed easy access to inexpensive child care, that is, families with only one parent in the home.

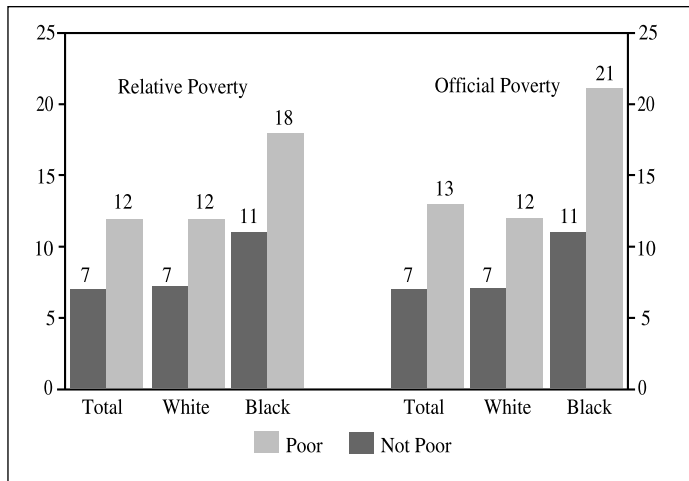
POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

POVERTY, WORK STATUS, AND FAMILY BREAK-UP AND DOUBLING-UP

Using relative poverty thresholds to measure poverty status in the initial month of two-year periods during the mid-1980s, the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) provides results showing the chances that a two-parent family household will discontinue within two years. Such family households cease to exist mainly when the parents experience a marital separation (family break-up), or when the family moves into the home of other relatives or non-relatives, in a doubled-up housing situation.

In the mid-1980s, two-parent family households were almost twice as likely to discontinue within two years if they were relatively poor than if they were not relatively poor, at 12 versus 7 percent (Figure 40). Among white two-parent families, the corresponding discontinuation rates were 12 versus 7 percent, but among blacks these rates were substantially larger at 18 versus 11 percent. Estimates based on official poverty rates were quite similar. Officially poor two-parent family households were about twice as likely to discontinue within two years as non-poor ones, at 13 versus 7 percent, and the corresponding estimates were 12 and 7 percent for whites, but 21 and 11 percent for blacks. These results suggest that stresses associated with economic insecurity or need, as reflected in having below-poverty income, contribute substantially to the break-up and doubling-up of two-parent families.

Figure 40. PERCENT OF TWO-PARENT FAMILIES THAT DISCONTINUED WITHIN TWO YEARS BY POVERTY STATUS: MID-1980s



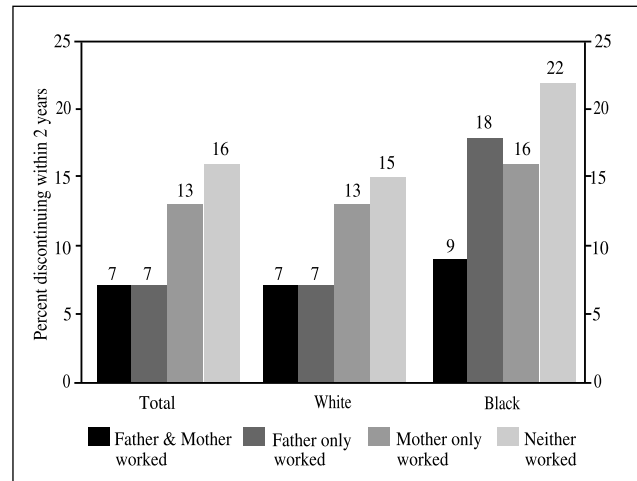
Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "Studies in Household and Family Formation — When Households Continue, Discontinue, and Form," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 179, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1992; and unpublished estimates.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

POVERTY, WORK STATUS, AND FAMILY BREAK-UP AND DOUBLING-UP (continued)

Joblessness among fathers, also measured in the initial month of two-year periods, has a similar effect on family discontinuation (Figure 41). The two-year discontinuation rate is 7 percent in families where only the father worked, or where both the father and mother worked, but it climbed to 13-16 percent among families where the mother only worked or where neither parent worked. The pattern was similar for whites. Seven percent of two-parent families with a working father discontinued within two years, compared to 13-15 percent if the father did not work. Among blacks, however, the pattern was notably different, since a two-year discontinuation rate as low as 9 percent was found only if both the husband and the wife worked. The Black two-year discontinuation rates were 16-22 percent if only one parent worked or if neither parent worked (Differences between 16, 18, and 22 percent are not statistically significant, and the difference between 9 and 16 percent is not statistically significant).

Figure 41. PERCENT OF TWO-PARENT FAMILIES THAT DISCONTINUED WITHIN TWO YEARS BY WHETHER FATHERS AND MOTHERS WORKED: MID-1980s



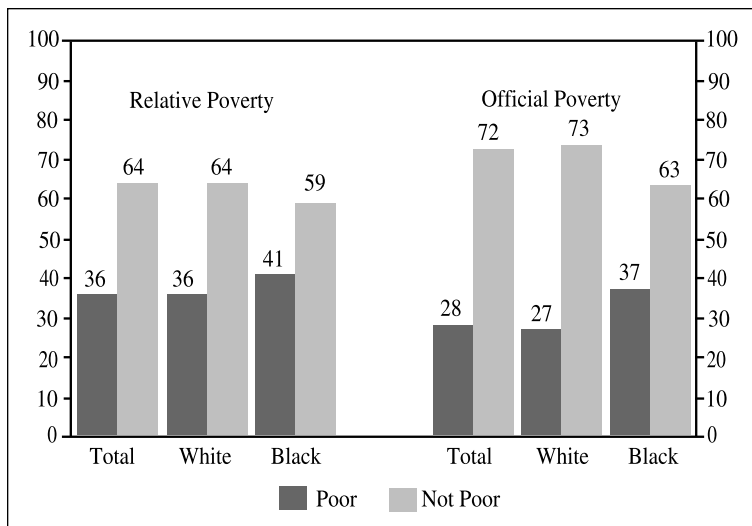
Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "Studies in Household and Family Formation — When Households Continue, Discontinue, and Form," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No.179, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1992.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

In so far as stresses associated with economic insecurity or need contribute to the discontinuation of two-parent families, these results suggest the level of security achieved by white two-parent households where only the husband works may not have been reached by black two-parent households, on average, unless both the black husband and wife worked. If so, the reasons may be that black men had a much lower average income than white men. For example, among married, spouse present, men who worked year-round full-time in 1990, the median income of blacks was 23 percent less than for whites, at \$24,960 versus \$32,464, respectively (DeNavas and Welniak, 1991).

Because poor two-parent families are much more likely to discontinue than non-poor ones, many children in poor mother-child family households newly-formed through marital separation have mothers who lived in poverty before the marital separation. Using relative poverty thresholds to measure poverty status in the initial and final months of one-year periods in the mid-1980s indicates the following (Figure 42).

Figure 42. CHILDREN IN POOR MOTHER-CHILD FAMILIES FORMED WITHIN THE LAST YEAR THROUGH MARITAL SEPARATION, PERCENT OF MOTHERS WHO WERE POOR ONE YEAR EARLIER IN PREVIOUS TWO-PARENT FAMILY: MID-1980s



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "Studies in Household and Family Formation — When Households Continue, Discontinue, and Form," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No.179, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1992; and unpublished estimates.

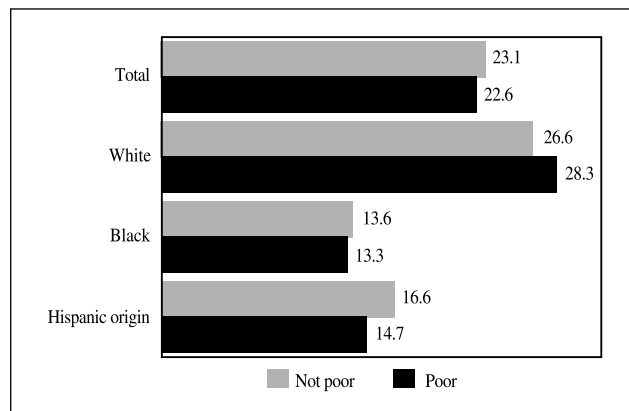
THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

POVERTY, WORK STATUS, AND FAMILY BREAK-UP AND DOUBLING-UP (continued)

For children in relatively poor mother-child family households that were formed within the past year through a marital separation, the proportion whose mothers also had been relatively poor in their two-parent family household one year earlier was 36 percent overall, 36 percent for whites, and 41 percent for blacks. Corresponding estimates for officially poor children are somewhat smaller but still substantial in magnitude, at 28 percent overall, 27 percent for whites, and 37 percent for blacks. In short, a large proportion of children in poor mother-child families newly-formed through marital separation were already poor in their two-parent family prior to the marital separation, because the father and mother did not earn enough income to lift the family out of poverty.

Having discussed discontinuation rates among two-parent families, it also is valuable to focus on discontinuation rates among one-parent, mother-child families (Figure 43). These families discontinue mainly when the mother marries, or when the family moves into a doubled-up family situation. Overall, the two-year discontinuation rate for mother-child families was 23 percent regardless of whether or not the family was officially poor. Among whites, two-year discontinuation rates were essentially identical at 27-28 percent, for officially poor and not poor mother-child families, and among blacks the two-year discontinuation rates also were essentially identical at 13-14 percent for officially poor and not poor mother-child families.

Figure 43. PERCENT OF POOR AND NON-POOR MOTHER-CHILD FAMILIES DISCONTINUING WITHIN TWO YEARS, BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN: MID-1980s



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "Studies in Household and Family Formation — When Households Continue, Discontinue, and Form," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 179, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1992.

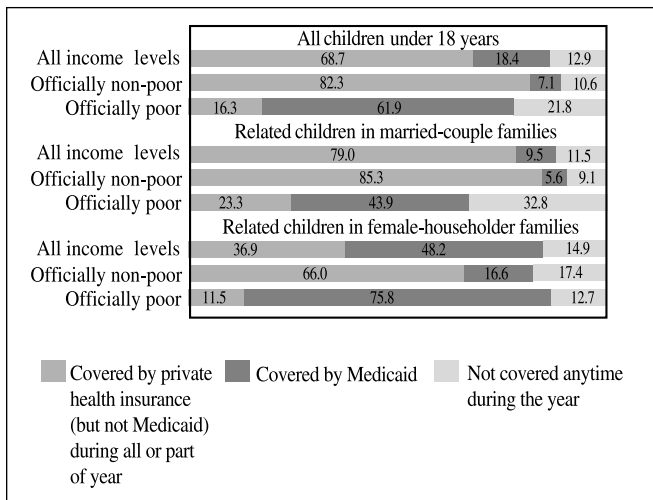
Although official poverty status is not related to the chances that mother-child families will discontinue, it is important to note the large size of these dissolution rates. Over a two-year period, nearly 1-in-4 existing mother-child family households discontinue, either through marriage or doubling-up, only to be replaced by newly-formed mother-child households. Among whites more than 1-in-4 existing mother-child family households discontinue and are replaced by new ones within two years, and among blacks nearly 1-in-7 mother-child family households are replaced by new ones within two years. In short, the turnover rate for mother-child family households is quite high; at any given time nearly 1-in-4 were formed during the preceding two years, and nearly 1-in-4 will cease to exist during the subsequent two years.

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OFFICIAL POVERTY AND HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

As health care costs rise, health insurance coverage has become increasingly important for children. Despite the substantial work among all parents, 13 percent of children in 1990 were not covered by health insurance anytime during the year (Figure 44). Among officially poor children, a large 22 percent were not covered anytime during the year, and even among officially non-poor children, 11 percent were not covered.

Figure 44. HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE, BY OFFICIAL POVERTY STATUS AND FAMILY TYPE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS: 1990



Source: Littman, Mark S., "Poverty in the United States: 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Series P60-175, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1991.

Many children who were covered by health insurance depended at least partly on government-supported Medicaid, 18 percent overall, 44 percent for officially poor children in married-couple families, and 76 percent for officially poor children in female-householder families. Despite Medicaid, however, 13 percent of officially poor children in female-householder families were not covered by health insurance at all during the year, and a large 33 percent of officially poor children in two-parent families were not covered. These last results suggest the possibility that, at least among poor two-parent families with medical problems, the need for health care and Medicaid eligibility rules may act as an incentive for family break-up.

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CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Questions about the disability status of children were asked of parents or guardians of children less than 22 years of age in the 1990 and 1991 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (This disability section is drawn directly from, McNeil, 1993, pp. 13-14). Questions about “any limitations at all in the usual kind of activities done by most children their age” and “received therapy or diagnostic services designed to meet their developmental needs” were asked about children 0 to 6 years of age. A question about “limitations in their ability to do regular school work” was asked about children 6 to 21 years of age, and a question about “a long lasting condition that limits their ability to walk, run, or use stairs” was asked about children 3 to 14 years of age.

The disability rate among children 0 to 2 years old was 2.2 percent [Tables 28]. The proportion with a limitation in usual kind of activity was 1.3 percent, and 1.6 percent received therapy or services for developmental needs. (The latter figure is not statistically different from either of the two preceding figures). The proportion identified as having a severe disability (a limitation caused by autism, cerebral palsy, or mental retardation) was 0.4 percent (Table 30).

The disability rate among children 3 to 5 years was 5.2 percent. The proportion with a limitation in usual kind of activity was 2.6 percent, and 4.3 percent had received therapy or services for developmental needs (The latter figure is not statistically different from the overall figure of 5.2 percent). The proportion identified as “limited in their ability to walk, run, or use stairs” was 1.3 percent. The proportion with a severe disability was 0.7 percent, not statistically different from the rate for children 0-2 years old.

Children 6 to 14 years of age had a disability rate of 6.3 percent. The proportion who were limited in their ability to do regular school work was 5.4 percent, and 1.6 were limited in their ability to walk, run, or use stairs. (The latter figure is not statistically different from the comparable figure for children 3 to 5 years old.) The proportion with a severe disability was 1.3 percent. (The latter figure is not statistically different from the preceding figure).

The disability status of persons 15 to 21 years of age was measured by direct questions about functional limitation, ADL limitations, IADL limitations, and the use of special aids. If the person lived with a parent or guardian, disability status was also measured by a question of the parent or guardian concerning the child’s ability to do regular school work. The overall disability rate among persons 15 to 17 years of age (as determined both by direct questions and questions asked of parents) was 9.3 percent. The proportion identified as having a limitation of their ability to do regular school work was 4.4 percent.

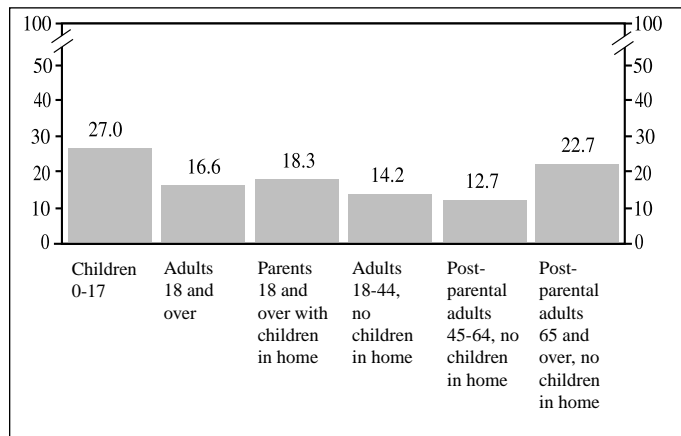
CHILDREN AS THE UNIT OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Through much of this chapter, children have been used as the unit of analysis, and it may seem obvious that research about children should be conducted in this fashion. Until very recently, however, most social, economic, and demographic studies involving children actually have used parents, adults, or families as the unit of statistical analysis, an approach which in some situations can be quite misleading if the interest actually is in children (Hernandez, 1986, Qvortrup, 1993).

Figure 45 shows, for example, the relative poverty rates in 1988 for (1) children age 0-17, (2) adults 18 and over, (3) parents 18 and over with children in the home, (4) adults age 18-44 with no children in the home, (5) post-parental adults age 45-64 with no children in the home, and (6) post-parental adults 65 years and over with no children in the home. The results show that 27 percent of children lived in relative poverty, compared to only 18 percent of parents. For most other adults, the relative poverty rate was still lower at 13-14 percent for adults age 18-64 with no children in the home.

At the opposite economic extreme, Figure 46 shows the percent living in luxury (with family incomes at least 50 percent higher than the median, with family size adjustments). In 1988, 22 percent of children lived in luxury, compared to 30 percent of parents, and 45-50 percent of adults age 18-64 with no children. These statistics show that distribution of economic living levels of children is quite different from that of parents, and even more different from that of adults without children in the home.

Figure 45. PERCENT IN RELATIVE POVERTY FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS: 1988

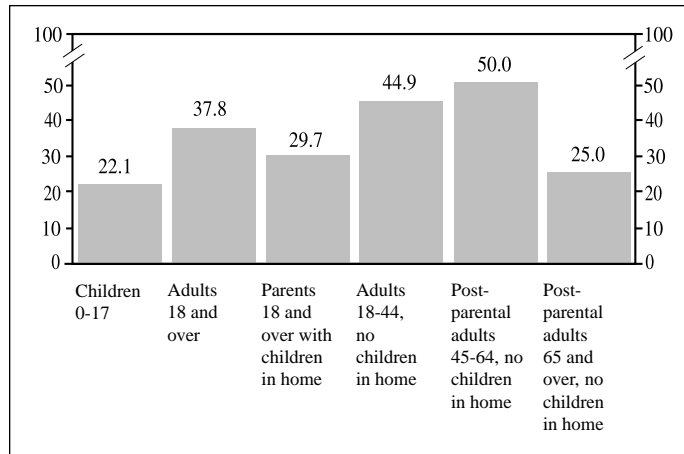


Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

Figure 47 shows, for families with children and for children themselves, the proportions which have specific numbers of children in the home. In 1991, 41 percent of families with children included exactly one child, but only 22 percent of children lived in families where they were the lone child. At the opposite extreme, only 20 percent of families with children had three or more children present, but 37 percent of children lived in families with a total of at least three children.

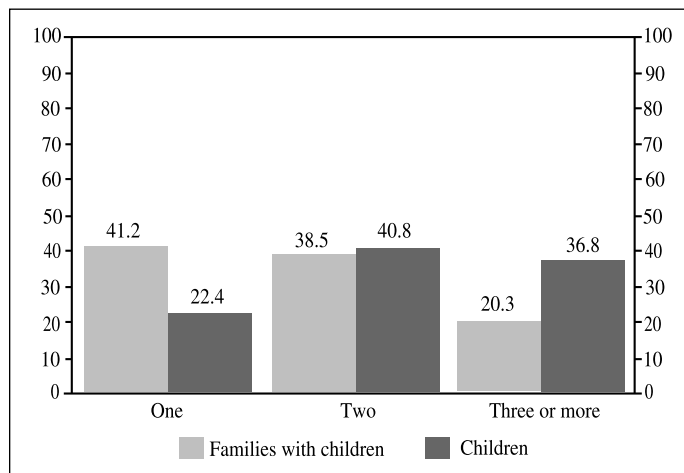
THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

Figure 46. PERCENT WITH LUXURY LEVEL INCOME FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS: 1988



Source: Hernandez, Donald J., "America's Children, Resources from Family, Government and the Economy," Russell Sage Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1993.

Figure 47. PERCENT WITH ONE, TWO, AND THREE OR MORE CHILDREN IN THE HOME FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN: 1993



Source: Rawlings, Steve W., "Household and Family Characteristics: March 1993," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P20-477, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 1994.

These statistics show clearly that at least for some topics of research, it makes an enormous difference whether the unit of analysis is children or some other adult-based measure.

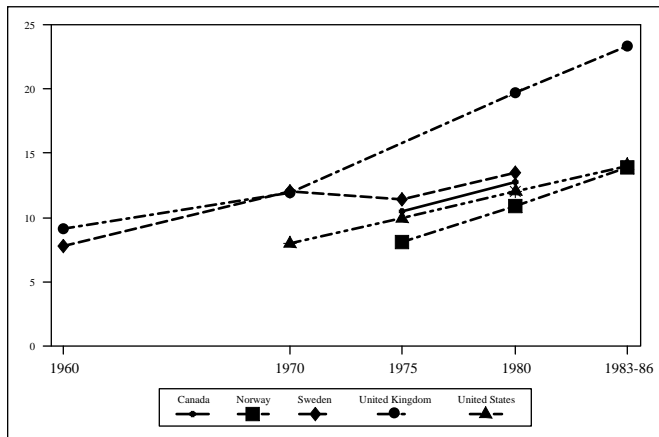
In order to provide the public with basic annual statistics on the living arrangements of children, the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1984 began publishing a table of statistics from the Current Population Survey using children as the unit of analysis. The most recent published table presents statistics for children by age, race, and Hispanic origin on number of siblings in the home, age, education, and employment status of parents in the home, the presence of other adults in the home, family income, poverty, geographic area of residence, tenure of housing unit, and whether the unit is a public housing unit (Saluter, 1994).

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

CHILDREN AND PUBLIC POLICY

One example of the critical importance of public policy for children is reflected in a series of international comparisons. Figure 48 shows that the proportion of children living in single-parent families has been increasing substantially not only in the U.S. but in a range of developed countries. Similarly, Figure 49 shows there have been wide-spread increases in the percentage of births occurring to unmarried mothers, although there are large differences in levels across countries.

Figure 48. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES: 1960 TO 1986



Note: All data for the United Kingdom refer to Great Britain. Data for 1983 to 1986 for the United Kingdom refer to 1986, to 1983 for Norway, and 1985 for the United States. Children are defined as follows: Canada - age 0 to 24 years; Norway - under age 20; Sweden - 18 years and under for 1960, 1970 and 1975, and 15 years and under for 1980; United Kingdom under age 16 or aged 16 to 18 and in full-time education; United States - under age 18.

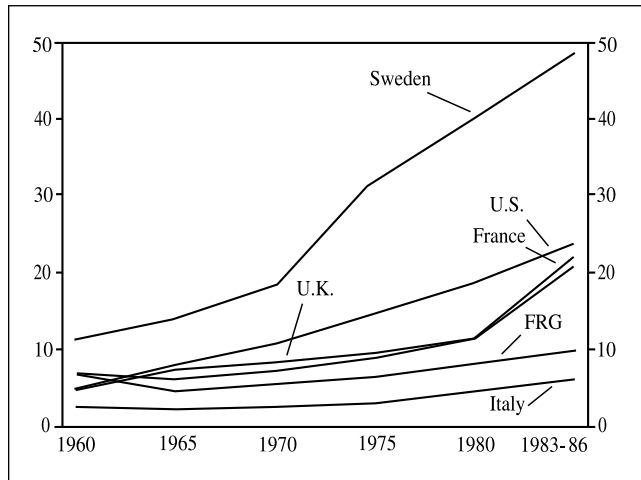
Source: Hobbs, Frank and Laura Lippman, "Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison," U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Population Reports, Series P95, 80, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990.

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CHILDREN AND PUBLIC POLICY (continued)

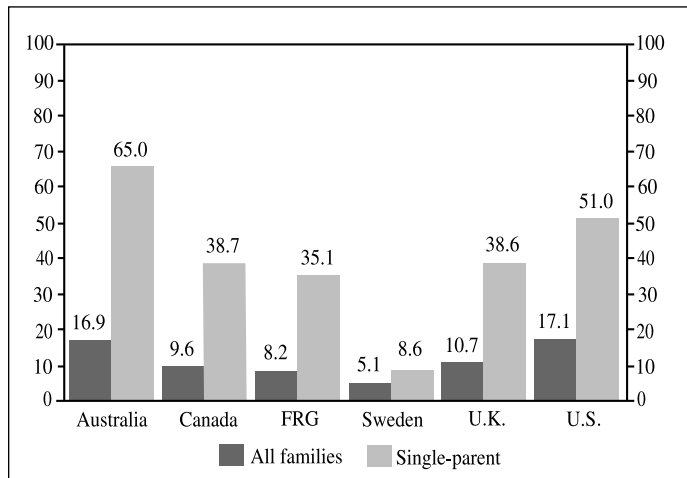
Figure 50 shows there also are enormous differences in poverty (measured in a fashion differing slightly from the official U.S. poverty concept). For example, U.S. children around 1980 were more than three times as likely as Swedish children to be living in poverty (17 versus 5 percent), and U.S. children in single-parent families were more than five times as likely as corresponding Swedish children to be living in poverty (51 versus 9 percent).

Figure 49. PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL BIRTHS TO UNMARRIED WOMEN: 1960 TO 1986



Source: Hobbs, Frank and Laura Lippman, "Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison," U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Population Reports, Series P95, 80, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990.

Figure 50. POVERTY AMONG CHILDREN, BY FAMILY TYPE: CIRCA 1980



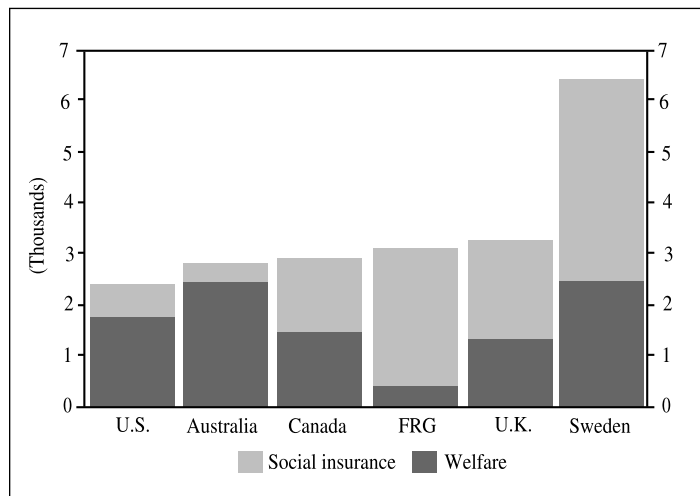
Source: Hobbs, Frank and Laura Lippman, "Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison," U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Population Reports, Series P95, 80, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

What accounts for these differences in poverty rates? Part of the difference is no doubt due to the low levels of support provided by government transfers to poor families with children in the U.S. compared to Sweden. In the U.S. around 1980, the average poor family with children received only about \$2400 per year in government transfers compared to \$6400 in Sweden (Figure 51). An additional part of the difference is no doubt due to the low proportion of poor families with children receiving any government transfers. Among the countries included in Figure 52, only 73 percent of poor families with children in the U.S. received government transfers—27 percent received none—while in all the other countries 99-100 percent of poor families with children received government transfers.

These comparisons suggest the enormously important effect that social policies may have on the economic welfare of children. It is not difficult to imagine that a wide range of additional policies also have important consequences for the intellectual, physical, and socio-emotional development and functioning of children.

Figure 51. GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS TO POOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN: CIRCA 1980 (in 1979 U.S. Dollars (thousands))



Note: Poverty determined before taxes.

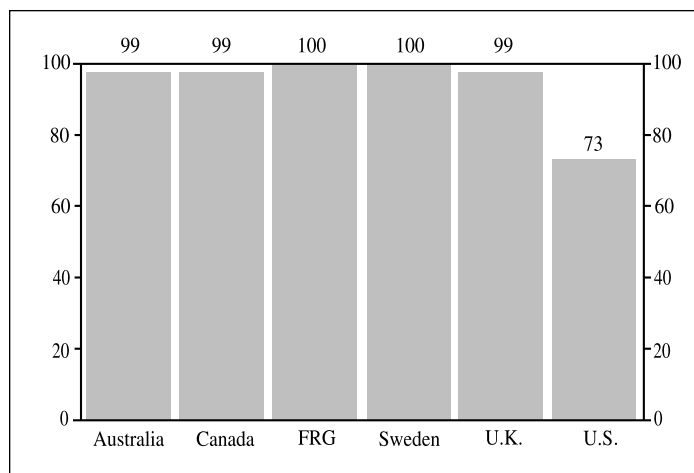
Source: Hobbs, Frank and Laura Lippman, "Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison," U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Population Reports, Series P95, 80, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990.

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

CHILDREN AND PUBLIC POLICY (continued)

For example, the economic situation of children, and hence the development and functioning of children, may be affected greatly by tax laws (depending on how progressive or regressive tax rates are), by minimum wage laws (which set a lower limit on wages that can be paid to adults, and hence to parents), and by a wide range of economic policies that influence the amount of inequality in the income distribution, and hence the economic inequality experienced by children. The physical and interpersonal living situation of children also may be affected greatly by government policies concerning the quality and cost of housing, the time available for parental or family leave, the quality and cost of pre-school education, and the quality, cost, and access to health care.

Figure 52. PERCENT OF PRE-TAX TRANSFER POOR WHO RECEIVE TRANSFERS



Source: Hobbs, Frank and Laura Lippman, "Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison," U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Population Reports, Series P95, 80, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990.

In short, although most public policies are developed, implemented, and evaluated with little attention to their consequences for children, it seems likely that an extremely wide range of public policies may, in fact, have important consequences for the current well-being and future development of children. This suggests that statistics on children may be of great value both to scholars and to policy-makers interested in how public policies interact with other social and economic changes and in the consequences of public policies themselves.

HISTORICAL AND IMPORTANT FUTURE STATISTICS ON CHILDREN

As a practical matter, how can statistics on children be obtained? Many important questions about children can be answered by re-analyzing existing data bases (censuses, registration systems, surveys) using children as the unit of analysis. This is how the research for *America's Children: Resources from Family, Government, and the Economy* (Hernandez, 1993) was conducted (See Appendix II). This research became possible only a decade ago with the advent of microdata files for the 1940 and 1950 U.S. censuses.

Analyzing existing data can be very valuable, but it has limits, because it depends on the kinds of data already collected, and very little data have been collected on children themselves. To help improve this situation and to provide a basis for assessing welfare and health care reforms that may occur in the U.S. in the near future, the U.S. Bureau of the Census is planning a new Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) collecting panel data for all the persons in a 20,000 household national sample on an annual basis for the period 1993-2002.

Extremely detailed data would be collected on the timing and income received from participation in the full range of government welfare programs, on the timing and income received from paid work by parents and other household members, and on changes in family composition. Most important for the current report, plans are being considered for collecting data on children's school enrollment, math and reading skills, social development, positive behaviors and behavior problems, health status, etc.

If major welfare and health care reforms are implemented during the coming years, these data can be a valuable vehicle for assessing the success of the reforms along a variety of dimensions, including their consequences for the development and well-being of children. With data collection beginning in 1993, this survey can provide baseline data for several years before major reforms occur, it can provide a "moving picture" of dynamic changes as they occur in parental employment, welfare program participation, and children's outcomes, and it can provide the basis for assessing short-term and medium-term consequences of such changes for the well-being and development of children.

POPULATION CHANGE AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The past 10-15 years brought rapid and wide-spread increases in social science interest and research regarding the circumstances of children and the nature of childhood (Hernandez, 1986; Qvortrup, 1993; Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, and Wintersberger, 1994). This blossoming of children and childhood as an object of scientific study goes hand-in-hand with increasing interest in the consequences for children of a wide range of social, economic, and demographic changes, and of social welfare and health policies.

In closing this chapter, then, it seems appropriate to highlight two reasons for policy-makers and researchers to direct attention toward children. First, although most past research and policy interest has focused on adults, children are people too. Hence, insofar as policy-makers and researchers are interested in human welfare, children also should be an explicit focus of their research and policy deliberations. Second, the children of today are the adults of tomorrow. Hence, insofar as research and social policy are concerned with the quality of future citizens, future workers, and future parents, they should focus explicitly on the development and well-being of today's children.

APPENDIX I

It is necessary to define doubling-up as measured in this chapter and to discuss three methodological issues (Table 27). This chapter uses children as the unit of analysis and classifies them as living in a not doubled-up family if the other members of the household consist only of one or both of the child's parents, and any of the child's siblings under age 25. On the other hand, children are classified as living in a doubled-up family if they have at least one parent in the home, but there is also at least one additional relative other than parents or over-age-25-siblings living in the household. Finally, children with no parents in the home are classified and distinguished as such.

The first methodological issue concerns historical analyses and changes in data collection procedures. Results for 1939-1979 are derived from censuses conducted during the following year ending in "0" (because poverty measures are based on income data pertaining to the year prior to data collection, the convention followed here is to designate estimates as pertaining to years ending in 9). Results for the 1980s, however, are obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Because of differences in data collection procedures, results from population censuses and surveys can differ in important ways. Consequently, to provide a bridge across data collection methods, results are presented for 1979 based on both the 1980 Census and the 1980 CPS.

The second methodological issue is that children living in "secondary" or "unrelated" subfamilies (with one or both parents in the home) in 1940 and 1950 are classified here as having no parents in the home. Overall, these children probably amount to no more than 1 percent of all white children and 2 percent of all black children during these two years.

The third methodological issue concerns improved measurement in the CPS in the early the 1980s. During 1982 and 1983 the Census Bureau implemented improved methods for identifying parent-child relationships within households. Preliminary estimates indicate that this improvement in measurement procedures produced an artifactual increase in the proportion of children living in mother-child families amounting to approximately 1.67 percent of all children. Since these children also had someone other than parents in the home, there was also artifactual increase in the proportion of children living in doubled-up families of approximately this magnitude.

To ascertain the size of this artifact for more limited universes of children, and its effect on trends spanning the 1980s, it would be useful to analyze changes for those universes for 1980-1981, and 1983 through the end of the 1980s. Such analyses are planned but have not yet been conducted. Consequently, the current best estimates of changes in doubling-up for children during the 1980s may be made as the following: the changes in the total proportion living either in doubled-up families as measured here or in households with no parents present. Furthermore, it is plausible that much of the difference between this total and the component consisting only of measured changes in doubling-up, actually occurred sometime before 1980 or 1981, most likely during the 1970s and 1960s when there were general increases in one-parent family living for children.

CREATING DATA BASES FOR CHILDREN AND STATISTICAL ESTIMATES

APPENDIX II

The research for *America's Children: Resources from Family, Government, and the Economy* (Hernandez, 1993) and for much of the SIPP data in this chapter (Hernandez, 1992) required the creation of three distinct sets of microdata bases, each of which was a large and complex undertaking.

The first set consisted of data bases with children as the unit of organization and analysis, based on the population censuses of 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980. Since the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) for each census consisted of household records with household data, and person records with individual person data, the following steps were required: (1) select the person record for each child, (2) identify all the other persons in the child's household, (3) use data on family and subfamily relationships to identify each child's parent(s) in the home, each child's sibling(s) in the home and each child's additional relative(s) and non-relative(s) in the home, (4) obtain and merge data for these other persons and for the household onto the child's record, (5) calculate family and household income for each child, (6) calculate poverty measure, etc.

Since family relationship data are reported according to how each person in the household is related to a householder or reference person, and in terms of any subfamilies in the home, the identification of how a child was related to each person in the household required an extremely complex computer program mapping possible relationships through the householder. The 1940 and 1950 censuses involved additional tailored programming, because certain characteristics were originally collected in these censuses only for "sample line" persons. The specific variables collected and the response categories differed somewhat from census to census, necessitating additional specially tailored programming for each census to insure conceptual consistency of results spanning the forty years of the data collection period. All together, the creation of these data bases involved processing about 7,000,000 records.

The second set consisting of data bases from the 1980 and 1989 Current Population Survey (CPS) followed a similar, but somewhat more complicated series of steps, since these public use files consist of three, instead of two, types of records, namely, household records, family records, and person records. More than 500,000 records were processed.

The third set consisting of data bases from the 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) involved an additional level of complexity, because data were collected on a month-by-month basis for each sample person for a period of about two years for each panel. If the data from each census and CPS are akin to a still photograph capturing reality at a single point in time, then data from the SIPP are akin to a motion picture consisting of a large number of photographs which taken together portray ongoing changes in reality. Hence, the analysis of SIPP data involved extremely sophisticated computer programming. Approximately 100,000 records were processed.

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